University of Alberta

Beyond Modernity: Islamic Conservatism in the Late Ottoman Period

By

Amal Nadim Ghazal ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

History

Department of History and Classics

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 1999

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-40007-7

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Amal Nadim Ghazal

Title of Thesis: Beyond Modernity: Islamic Conservatism in the Late Ottoman Period

Degree: Master of Arts

Year this Degree Granted: 1999

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

214-F Michener Park
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T6H 4M5

Date: December 23, 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Beyond Modernity: Islamic Conservatism in the Late Ottoman Period* submitted by Amal Ghazal in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

Supervisor: Dr. Ann McDougall

Dr. Earle Waugh

Dr. Andrew Gow

Dr. David Mills

Date: 25 November 1998

To my mother who has taught me that everything is possible,
to my father whose memory has always been a powerful inspiration,
to Nadima, Iyad, Nadim, Firas and Alaa who bring joy to my life, and
to my dearest husband and friend Kassim, whose love, encouragement
and patience have made work more enjoyable than ever...

Abstract

The historiography of modern Islamic thought has focused on Islamic reform and renewal at the expense of Islamic conservatism. Islamic conservatism looked at modernity as a threat to Islam and Muslims, and considered reform a religious heresy that would lead Muslims astray. The writings of Yūsuf al-Nabhāni during the Hamidien period reveal both this hostile attitude and the strategies followed by conservative scholars to undermine the impact of modernity and Islamic reform. On one hand, the conservatives sought the political support of the Ottoman Sultan whose pan-Islam policy was threatened by reformers. On the other hand, they argued against the religious foundation of reform: *Ijtihād*. The practice of *Ijtihād* was rejected by conservatism, and considered a tool to introduce religious 'innovations' and to deviate Muslims from the 'true' religion. The scholarly network of both conservatives and reformers further explains the interdependency of politics and religion during `Abd al-Hamīd's reign.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of this thesis is due to many people who have contributed to its conception and development. My six years spent under the supervision of Dr. Samir Seikaly at the American University of Beirut have shaped my intellectual background. I am much indebted to his care and patience during those years. It was his suggestion to analyze the writings of al-Nabhāni that initiated this project.

Dr. Ann McDougall's encouragement and excellent supervision have contributed to the development of this thesis from a set of ideas to a comprehensive theory and organized arguments. I thank her a lot and much appreciate her care and understanding.

Long conversations with Dr. Earle Waugh have broadened my knowledge on many aspects of Islam. I am indebted to his encouragement and friendship.

Dr. Andrew Gow's comments on the thesis have been much helpful and have opened doors for future interest in different intellectual topics. Thank you for your insightful comments.

I would also like to thank the director of the Zāhiriyya Library in Damascus for making research there an easy and pleasant task.

To a person who preferred to remain anonymous and who provided me with several writings of al-Nabhāni.

To my colleagues Sheila Donnelly, Muhammad Muhammad and Muhammad Nouhi for their shared discussions and encouragement.

To all members of the History Department, especially our graduate secretary Lydia Dugbazah for keeping a watching eye.

To all members of my family for their continuous support and love.

Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter I
Modernity and Islam: A Historiography

Introduction 7
Conservatism and Reforms: A Background 10
Beyond Modernity 16

Chapter II
Yūsuf al-Nabhāni: Conservatism in service of `Abd al-Hamīd

Introduction 28
Yūsuf al-Nabhāni : Religious Background and Political Affiliation 32
Text and Context: Al-Nabhāni in Hamidien Politics 39

Chapter III
Western Education: All Evil

Introduction 49
"They teach them to become enemies of the State and Religion": 'Blasphemous' Education 54

Chapter IV
Ijtihād: Between Religious Dogmatism and Political Pragmatism

Introduction 67
Ijtihād and Reform 71
Ijtihād and Conservatism 76

Chapter V
Apostasy and Political Incorrectness

Introduction 90
Al-Afghāni: "The Apostate" 93

`Abduh: "The Active Devil" 100
Rida: "Perpetuator of Evil" 109

Conclusion 110

Bibliography 117

Introduction:

Since the 1980's, the streets of Beirut have become a theatre for the display of religious banners. Their colorful printings have frequently urged Muslims to believe in the obligation to visit the Prophet Muhammad' s tomb and in the legitimacy to ask for the saints' supplication. While many Muslims do not consider these practices "orthodox", members of the Sufi group sponsoring those banners regard them as sacred duties that all Muslims must fulfill.[1]

The arguments about the "orthodoxy" and "unorthodoxy" of the aforementioned issues are only part of a larger debate between two major Muslim groups: religious reformers and members of Sufi Orders, to whom these practices are usually attributed.[2] Those involved in, and concerned

---

[1] The group I am referring to here is *Jam 'iyyat al-mashāri' al-khayriyya al-islāmiyya*, otherwise known as *al-Ahbāsh*. It is a political Sufi movement with its base in Lebanon and branches in the Middle East, Europe and North America. It emerged as a religious and political opposition to the modern Islamic movement and more specifically to the Muslim Brotherhood and all its offshoot groups. Other historical enemies include Ibn Taymiyya, his students, and the Wahhabi movement. For more details, see A. Nizar Hamzeh and R. Hrair Dekmejian. " A Sufi Response to Political Islamism: Al-Ahbash of Lebanon," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28(1996): 217-229. Although the article was to some extent successful in analyzing the ideological and political framework of the group (one has to acknowledge as well that it is the first academic attempt to study this movement) it failed to show it as a continuation of a rooted movement in Islamic history and failed to show its rival groups as an extensive outcome, at different levels, of the nineteenth and early twentieth century religious reforms. The *Ahbāsh* should not and cannot be studied only in the context of Lebanese or Middle Eastern politics but as a revival, incited by many conditions, of a century long suppressed Sufi movement.

[2]This fine separation between reformers and Sufis is somehow controversial and sometimes misleading since several reformers have been members of the Sufi Orders. Yet the "religious reforms" better designate those scholars and thinkers who have opposed some fundamental aspects of Sufi practices and dogmas, that they argued were alien to Islam, and in the late nineteenth century came to be known as the *Islāh* (the term literally means reform) movement or the Salafiyya group. *Salafiyya* is an Arabic term derived from *Salaf* or predecessors. The Salafiyya group regards the early period of Islam, the period of the *Salaf*, as the ideal example of how a Muslim state and society should be constructed. However, a major aspect of the modern *Salafiyya* or reform group was its appeal to some aspects of modernity, which they saw necessary to revive, not only Islam as a religion, but also, as a civilization.

with, the debate have mainly been the Muslim scholars ('Ulama) who are the learned elite[3] of Muslim societies and their most influential one. The early confrontation between "orthodoxy" supported by reformers and the "unorthodoxy" of some Sufis goes back to the thirteenth century, when some *'Ulama* started to raise concerns about "illegal" behaviors of Sufi Orders. Yet in the nineteenth century, the Sufi Orders, with few exceptions,[4] and Sufi thought in general, were criticized by many Muslim reformers as being not only the inheritors of "Muslim unorthodoxy" but also being the blocks in the way of the "advancement" of Muslim societies.[5] The race to adapt to changes in the Muslim world and to achieve "modernity" has yielded bitter controversies among Muslims, from which the Muslim world has not yet fully recovered.[6] While Muslim reformers in the nineteenth century regarded Islam and modernity as adaptable to each other and even closely related, conservatives[7] have perceived this adaptation as a compromise between Islam and "Christian" Europe, a compromise that would ultimately lead, in their eyes, to the extirpation of Islam. The same reformers who favored "adaptation" were those who, at the same time, headed criticism of Sufi

---

[3] Although the "learned elite" in nowadays terminology is a broader category that includes the educated and the specialized members of the society, it is used here in the context of those learned in the religious domain in the first place with, in many cases, knowledge of other domains.

[4] The exception here would apply on Neo-Sufism, an eighteenth century reform movement within Sufism. To be discussed below.

[5] We are confined here to the argument within Islam itself. The term "reformers" does not include "secular" thinkers who refused Islam as being the center and the goal of their arguments.

[6] For an analysis of the continuous discourse on issues related to modernity and Islam, see John O. Voll. *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World.* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1982).

[7] Conservative is used here in the context of "people who attempt to preserve the general outlines of the existing social order. They are protectors of the status quo."

Orders, to which many conservatives were affiliated. Thus, the dichotomy of Sufi and reformer evolved in the nineteenth century into a confrontation between "conservative" Sufis and "modern" reformers in the Muslim world in general, and in the Middle East in specific.[8]

My thesis ponders this closing chapter of the "pre-modern"[9] conservative movement, which coincided with both the pressure of modernization on Muslim societies and the reign of the Ottoman Sultan `Abd al-Hamīd II. My aim, besides shedding light on this movement that has not yet received a proper analysis from historians, is to analyze its "hermeneutics of survival" in face of "European modernity" and "Islamic reforms". More specifically, I focus on the alliance between religious conservatism from the Arabic speaking provinces,[10] where the Ottoman authorities still had a relatively firm base,[11] and `Abd al-Hamīd II, who, for reasons discussed below, offered the conservatives his courtesy and support, and they, in

---

See John Voll. "Conservative and Traditional Brotherhoods." *AAPSS* 524(November, 1992): 70.

[8]For the reformers, the appeal to modernization and its goal, modernity, should not only appear in the physical aspects of the modern age but in the effects and impact of modern thought in the reformulation of Islam. The same period was characterized by being the last of a sharp distinction between the two parts of this dichotomy, taking into consideration the voluntarily or involuntarily later engagement of the Sufi Orders and the conservative movement in general with many facets of modernity (mainly their use of modern technology, sciences...).

[9] I use this term solely for the purpose of distinguishing between the conservative movement as it existed until the turn of the century and the conservative movement as it adapted to some forms of modernization in the twentieth century, such as the study of sciences, foreign languages, technology...

[10]This, however, does not exclude the presence of religious conservatism outside this area. On the contrary, it suggests that scholars in the Arab Middle East were not but a chain in the conservative network in the Muslim world.

[11]At the time, the parts of the Ottoman Dynasty were organized according to the administrative regulations declared in 1864, 1867 and 1871. The Dynasty was divided into Provinces, sub-provinces, districts, municipalities, and villages. For more information, see Carter Findley. *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

return, aided him in his "legitimacy crisis", by affirming his claim as the Caliph of the Muslims, promoting his state-policy, and defending him and themselves against religious revisionist opposition.

Sources and Organization

The material used for this thesis relies primarily on the writings of Yūsuf al-Nabhāni, an influential voice of conservatism during the Hamidien period.[12] Among his writings, which exceed forty publications, his tracts supporting the Ottoman Sultan, warning Muslims against the danger of missionary schools, refuting *Ijtihād,* and defaming religious reformers are the most significant sources. Equally important are the writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformers, whom al-Nabhāni constantly criticized, mainly Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Rida. The Egyptian-based journal *al-Manār*, founded and directed by one of al-Nabhāni's critics, Rida, contains articles that reflect the enmity between al-Nabhāni and the reformers. Secondary works in religious, social and political history of the period are equally relevant in providing an analyze the conservatives' activities in the late Ottoman period and offer a variety of answers on the approaches to modernity within the Islamic context.

The first chapter is divided into three parts. The first is a summary of the relation between the development of the Sufi thought and their "debatable" practices, and Sufi infiltration into and influence on societies. The second is a brief sketch of the social and political background of the

[12] Chapter II examines the background and importance of al-Nabhāni.

intellectual debates between conservatives and reformers on the necessity of Islamic reforms. The third, however, is a historiography of the dichotomy of modernity and Islam, exposing different approaches to the topic, with a conclusion on where Islamic "conservatism" fits in this dichotomy.

The second chapter forwards the political issues raised in the late Ottoman Dynasty and their relation to the conservatives. It elaborates on the education and background of Yūsuf al-Nabhāni and the relevance of his writings to serve the purpose of a case study on religious conservatism in the face of modernity. His poem for the Ottoman Sultan is useful to examine the alliance between conservatism and the regime as a strategy to promote anti-reform measures, and to support any procedures that they saw slowing or preventing "modern" changes.

The third chapter deals with resistance to modernity as manifested in education. Al-Nabhāni's treatise on missionary schools further elaborates this attitude, enhanced by `Abd al-Hamīd's anti-missionary activities to maintain a stable Dynasty. However, missionary education was not evil for al-Nabhāni because of its challenge to the stability of the political regime but also because of its adoption of sciences and languages.

The fourth chapter explores the crucial point in their debates: *Ijtihād*.[13] A legal tool for reformers to accommodate modernity to Islam, *Ijtihād* was fiercely opposed by the conservative scholars, who denied the right and the ability of the Muslims to exercise it, accusing the reformers of sacrificing the teachings of Islam in favor of modernity. At the same time, *Ijtihād* serves as

[13] See more details on *Ijtihād* in chapter II.

a good example on the intersection between the religious and political discourses. Examining the history of *Ijtihād* shows the critical relation between this "legal institution" and the "political institution", represented by `Abd al-Hamīd. Thus, *Ijtihād* is no more confined to a religious debate but becomes part of the political one.

The fifth and last chapter relies on al-Nabhāni's *ad-hominem* poem defaming the religious reformers and lamenting the "modern" age, to further explain the political context of the religious debate(s). The conclusion is a summary of conservative hermeneutics used to transcend the impact of modernity.

Chapter I

Modernity and Islam: A Historiography

Introduction

Sufism, generally labeled as Islamic mysticism,[14] originated primarily as a reform movement against religious and social corruption under the Umayyad Dynasty.[15] Approaches to mystical experiences started to develop into various forms during the ninth century, rooted in the original thought of Shi`ism, and particularly emphasized by Ja`far al-Sādeq (d. 765), the sixth leader of the Shi`is.[16] In his commentary, Ja`far explained four principles in the Quran: expression for common people, allusion for the intellectual and spiritual elite, touches of grace for saints, and realities for the Prophets.[17] This hierarchy deeply influenced Sufi thought and experiences, defining the stages or the Path, which the Sufis should follow to become the elite of the elite. It also produced the idea of sainthood, which developed along with the

---

[14] There is no conventional definition for the term Sufism. It can be understood as a pious manifestation of saints' veneration and tomb visitation or as another school of Islamic philosophy and scholarship. For more details read the introduction of Julian Johansen. *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt: The Battle for Islamic Tradition.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[15] Although the Sufis reflect back to the days of the Prophet, their revolutionary aspects originated under the Umayyads and were elaborated under the Abbasids. For a comprehensive examination and analysis of Sufism see Annemarie Schimmel. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1975) and J. Spencer Trimingham. *The Sufi Orders in Islam.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[16] Muslims are divided into two major sects: Sunnis and Shi`is. The Shi`is were originally those who supported `Ali, the Prophet's cousin, to become his immediate successor and objected to the nomination of Abu Bakr, then `Umar, and `Uthman to the Caliphate on the basis of `Ali's priority. Political disagreement developed later into fierce battles between the two sects, and into religious discrepancy, sharpening their differences. Although Sufism has been a Sunni phenomenon, it borrowed much from Shi`ism.

[17] Schimmel. *Mystical Dimensions*: 41.

Paths. With time, different Paths were established to lead to the ultimate Truth and the perfect devotion that the Sufis were looking forward to. These Paths, as methods of mystical education, took the form of Orders, as their organizations, and were usually named after the founder or initiator of this Path. Founders of Paths and pious people within the Orders were known as God' s protégés (*awliyā ' Allah*) or saints, associated with spiritual power and the capacity to perform miracles. A parallel development to sainthood was visiting the tombs of the saints for different purposes, intercession on behalf of God being one of them. The visit was sometimes accompanied by other activities, including group gathering, weeping, praying, and sometimes dancing. With time, the Sufi orders were penetrating Muslim societies at large and recruiting more adherents. The final stage of the development of the Order paralleled the foundation and early expansion of the Ottoman Dynasty[18], which relied on the spirituality of the Sufis to fortify their warriors.[19] In the Ottoman Dynasty, Sufis "absorbed popular movements" and the Orders "played an important role in religious, social and even political life..."[20] However the evolution of Sufism into Orders and its association with saints' cults changed original facets of Sufism and contributed to its decline from the "religion of the elite" to "folk Islam":

---

[18] I use the term dynasty instead of empire to better translate the Arabic term *dawla* and the Ottoman term *devle*, used to describe the Ottoman rule. The use of the term Empire is problemtaic since it "would imply some analogy between the Ottoman 'empire', the Roman 'empire', the British 'empire', the Russian 'empire', and so forth. But the rule of the Ottomans was dynastic in the Middle Eastern tradition, drawing upon the most subject of its peoples (Albanians, Bosnians, Macedonians, and others) for its senior servants." See Antony Black. "Decolonization of Concepts." *Journal of Early Modern History*1(1997): 55-69.

[19] Trimingham. *The Sufi Orders*: 67-68.

> Sufi writings ceased to show real originality. They become limited to compilations, revisions and simplifications, endless repetition and embroidery on old themes, based upon the writings of earlier mystics... Numerous biographical collections of saints (*tabaqat al-awliya'*) or pure hagiographies (*manaqib al-`arifin*) were produced...[21]

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) was the first Muslim scholar to lead a vicious attack on visitations to tombs and supplication to saints, arguing that various grades of such behaviors were "unorthodox" and might lead to idolatry.[22] In spite of the continuous attack on them by Ibn Taymiyya's students, they gained more popularity among Muslims. Later, they were once again challenged by the Wahhabi movement, which stressed the "purification" of Islam from Sufi "innovations".[23] While previous religious reformers (Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawziyya, Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhāb) condemned these practices as unorthodox and evaluated them as innovations in Islam, modern religious reformers were to add another dimension to the debate by blaming these Sufi beliefs and practices for the regression and "backwardness" of Muslims and their failure to maintain a healthy Muslim society.[24] Yet Sufi

---

[20] Ibid: 69-70

[21] In the Arab provinces, few original writers can be mentioned. The two most important ones were `Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha`rāni and `Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulsi. Ibid.

[22] For more information on Ibn Taymiyya, see Muhammad Umar Memon. *Ibn Taimiya's Struggle against Popular Religion.* (Th. E. Homerin. "Ibn Taymiyyya's *al-Sufiyah wa al-Fuqara'. Arabica* 32(Juillet, 1985): 219-244. (Hungary: Mouton & Co, 1976).

[23] The movement is named after its founder Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhāb. It developed in the plateau of Najd in Arabia, where Ottoman authority had little influence. The puritanical thought of the movement and its war on the Sufi practices put it in confrontation with the Ottoman establishment. This theological challenge later developed to a physical one, when the Wahhabis militarily threatened Ottoman suzerainty in the Hijaz and the Fertile Crescent. For more details, see P. M. Holt. *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922: A Political History*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), and John Sabini. *Armies in the Sand: The Struggle for Mecca and Medina*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

[24] Many reformers were concerned about the "public" threat of these practices, since they are signs of "irrationality". "superstition" and "regression".

thinkers and leaders of the Orders had not turned a deaf ear for calls of reforms to the Orders and of the maintenance of "orthodoxy" in their beliefs and practices. Consequently, the eighteenth century witnessed a reform trend among several Orders, a phenomenon known as "Neo-Sufism".[25]

However, while some Orders were involved in the process of internal reforms, others had remained outside the scope of the influence of Neo-Sufism.[26] Despite the response for internal reforms, the challenge to conservative Sufism that began in the nineteenth century and continues today weakened the role of Orders in societies and set Sufism back considerably.[27]

Conservatism and Reforms: A Background

These debates at the turn of the century between religious reformers and conservatives were closely tied to and generated by the sweeping changes in the Ottoman Dynasty and its different institutions. Two broad contexts molded this discourse: the geographical, with the Ottoman Dynasty as its

---

[25] For more information on reform among Sufi Orders in the eighteenth century, see Nehemia Levtzion & John O. Voll (eds.) *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam.* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1987).

[26] The major studies in the filed point at the role of the Khalwatiyya and Naqshbandiyya in Neo-Sufism. However, a characteristic of these studies is their focus on Tariqas in specific regions, mainly North/West Africa and Egypt. Studies on Orders in geographic Syria remain insufficient, and thus fail to provide a comprehensive knowledge on the Orders.

[27] There is no doubt that religious reform deeply affected Sufi Orders, which witnessed a dramatic change from a mainstream presence to a peripheral and heavily scrutinized one. These criticisms led many Orders to seek some sort of reform and acknowledge that many practices were "unislamic" or "unorthodox". See, for instance, Julian Johansen. *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt,* and F. De Jong. *Turuk and Turuk-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Historical Study, in Organizational Dimensions of Islamic Mysticism.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978). Although both books analyze the Sufi Orders in Egypt they provide a clear idea on some aspects of reforms undertaken within the Orders themselves.

fertile ground, and the ideological, with Islam as the focal point and the framework of the arguments.[28]

The Ottoman Dynasty, where these religious disputes were nourished, reached the eighteenth century with a heavy burden of economic, social and political problems. It suffered severe losses on many fronts, was threatened by European invasion in different territories, followed by the impact of nationalism, a phenomenon which soon torn it apart. Meanwhile, European modernization, followed by the European powers themselves, had begun to make inroads in the Dynasty. In response, *Tanzimāt*, known as the Ottoman Reforms, were decreed in two periods: *Hatt-i Hümayun* (Imperial Prescript) in November 1839 and *Hatti- Sherif* (Reform Prescript) in 1856.

The new social fabric they produced affected many systems. The educational system, a monopoly of the Muslim religious elite, underwent serious changes. The new improvements produced the nucleus of a public secular education both at the civil and military levels, to which students from different religions were supposed to have equal access. The *Millet* system[29] also witnessed several reforms and was oriented towards a more secular society. The attention to the *Millet* was provided in the first Prescript but

---

[28] The best statement to explain the relation between the Ottoman Dynasty and Islam is the following: "Islam was for the Ottoman Empire the root, while the state grew only as a branch from it." Madeline C. Zilfi. *The politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)*. (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988): 23.

[29] The *Millet* system under the Ottomans and the previous Muslim regimes consisted of the non-Muslim communities, mainly the Christians and the Jews. Their religious and social life was regulated by their religious leaders who were appointed by the Muslim state itself. For more information see Ira M. Lapidus. *A History of Islamic Societies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

furthered in the Decree of 1856, which guaranteed the Christians from different sects, in addition to the Jews, new social and political privileges.

> Every distinction or designation tending to make any class whatsoever of the subjects of my Empire inferior to another because of their religion, language and race shall be forever effaced from the laws and regulations of the Empire... As all forms of religion are and shall be in any way annoyed on this account and no one shall change his religion.[30]

Challenging a long established system based on religious differentiation, the *Millet* system was replaced by the doctrine of Ottomanism, implying that all subjects of the Ottoman Dynasty were equal before the law. Many Muslims then felt that these reforms favored non-Muslims, and were concerned about the growing European interference on their behalf. This was especially true following the Crimean War,[31] which was the direct cause of the second step in *Millet* reforms. While non-Muslims benefited from the *Tanzimāt*, the Muslims

> were unmoved by the Tanzimat expression of Ottomanism that upheld the political equality of all subjects and robbed them of the psychological crutch that "Muslim superiority" provided.[32]

The time-honored image of the Sultan as the Protector of the Muslims was distorted in their eyes, and more specifically in the eyes of the religious elite. Most of the scholars of this elite led the opposition to "secularism" resulting from the *Tanzimāt*, but were unable to confront them because of their diminished power following the reforms. Severe losses of many long-existing

---

[30] Stanford Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Vol. II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: the Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): 125

[31] The Crimean War started in 1853 between the Ottomans and the Russians and resulted in the intervention of the European Powers on behalf of the Ottomans.

[32] Hasan Kayali. *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 30

privileges for the scholars as a result of the *Tanzimāt* had left many of them on the defensive, powerless in the face of reforms. Their role as the only means of transmitting education in Muslim societies had suffered dramatically, their prestige as the "wise" elite of the Muslims had deteriorated increasingly, and their position as protectors of Muslim endowment had completely disappeared.

Trying to pull the Dynasty together, the new Sultan `Abd al-Hamīd II (1876-1909), relied on the Muslim majority by declaring a pan-Islam policy and by claiming for himself the title of "Caliph of the Muslims."[33] Special attention was given to the Arab provinces, which were "designated as first rank and listed ahead of European and Anatolian provinces in official registers, and their governors were granted higher salaries."[34] This new policy balanced the previous one, when a political breach existed between the Capital and the farther parts of the Dynasty, and where

> the hand of the government was less heavy there than in the capital, and there is plenty of evidence that, as the century went on, it came to be regarded as in some sense alien, as it had not been earlier when political thought and sentiment naturally took a religious form.[35]

To be able to reach his subjects and diffuse his pan-Islam policy, `Abd al-Hamīd needed, first, intermediaries between himself and his Muslim subjects in these provinces and most importantly, supporters to confront the religious and political reformers who were criticizing him. Thus, he sought the

---

[33] Caliph is derived from the Arabic word *Khalīfa*, meaning the successor. In its religio-political context, the word means the successor of the Prophet in leading the Muslims.

[34] Kayali. *Arabs and Young Turks:* 32. Arabs were even absent in top government positions throughout Ottoman history. For more details on statistics, see Ibid: 20.

support of, among others, Arab conservative religious leaders of Sufi Orders who would promote pan-Islam among the masses they controlled[36] and would refute the reformers' arguments about religious and political "correctness" in order to curb their efforts. The conservative Sufis might have found it a golden opportunity to go to Istanbul, where they had never been before,[37] and use this power to defend themselves from the hammer of modernization and religious reform.

That the Sultan received a positive response from several scholars is undeniable. In fact, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a movement of Arabic speaking scholars between their provinces and Istanbul. Scholars from all parts of the Fertile Crescent and North Africa visited the court, and in some cases, resided for a long period of time in it, showing their allegiance to the Sultan, seeking his protection and actively participating in promoting his policy. Thus, his reign provided the occasion for many of them to revive the influence they had lost in the face of Sultan Mahmud II's reforms and the *Tanzimāt*.[38] Under `Abd al-Hamīd' s policy of

---

[35] Albert Hourani. "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables" in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*. William R. Polk & Richard Chambers (eds.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968): 60

[36] The Sultan assembled many Muslim scholars from the Arabic speaking provinces and many published works on the Sultan-Caliph afterwards. See Martin Kramer. *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 6-7.

[37] As a result of provincial alienation from the core of the Ottoman Dynasty, "never, wrote a contemporary observer, since the establishment of the Ottoman sultanate, had an Arab, whomever his ancestors were, put his forehead where they had put their feet." See B. Abu Manneh. "Sultan `Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies* 15(1979): 137.

[38] Mahmud II, by destroying the Janissaries and establishing a Ministry of *Awkāf* (endowment), eliminated the military ally of the `Ulama and undercut their economic base respectively. For more details see Polk & Chambers (eds.) *Beginnings of Modernization:* 36, and I. E. Petrosyan. "On the Motive Forces of the Reformist and Constitutionalist Movement in the Ottoman Empire (Some Social Transformation

Pan-Islam, the religious elite was regaining its previous prestige and increasing its revenues.[39] Taking advantage of the new situation, the `Ulama acted through the phenomenon Albert Hourani has called "the politics of the notables."[40]

> The political influence of the notables rests on two factors: on the one hand, they must possess "access" to authority, and so be able to advise, to warn, and in general to speak for society or some part of it at the ruler's court; on the other, they must have some social power of their own, whatever its form and origin, which is not dependent on the ruler and gives them a position of accepted and "natural" leadership.[41]

Their "access" to authority was again guaranteed by `Abd al-Hamīd, and "natural leadership" resided in the Orders they headed and controlled. This time, however, they were less agitated by purely secular reforms, functioning outside the religious domain. They were more concerned about the effects of modernity on the re-interpretation of Islam through the religious reformers' initiative to restore "original Islam". Inspired by European "Renaissance" and "modern" civilization, religious reformers, (the *Salafiyya* group) "assimilated key slogans of the *Tanzimāt* reformers -- reason, science, progress-- to their understanding of religion,"[42] and sought to save the Muslim world from all tenets and practices that they saw hindering the advancement of the Muslims. The early pioneers of the

---

processes)" in Economie et sociétés dans l' Empire Ottoman (fin du XVIIIe-début du XXe siècle): 13-24.

[39] Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire. Vol. II*: 257.

[40] Hourani. "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables": 41-68. The author used the term as a general description for the role of the `Ulama in the period of the beginnings of modernization and did not confine it to their activities under the reign of` `Abd al-Hamīd. However, as we will see later, this description best fit the court `Ulama of the Hamidien period.

[41] Ibid: 46

[42] David Dean Commins. *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 45.

Salafiyya movement were Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni (d.1897), Muhammad `Abduh (d.1906) and Rashīd Rida (d. 1935). Conservative scholars, who did not share with the reformers the urgent need to introduce changes in Muslim societies and did not agree on the ways by which these changes should be implemented, were engaged in a fierce confrontation with them. However the hermeneutics of this debate are yet to be explored due to an unbalanced scholarship in modern historiography.

Beyond Modernity

Modern intellectual historiography has not yet tackled an analysis of the conservative movement in the Muslim world in general and in the Middle East in specific. Studies on intellectual resistance to modernity have been shadowed by a dedicated literature on ideas and people in favor of modernity. Historians' lack of interest in the conservative movement is associated with ideological reasons and purposes, as Nikki Keddie, editor of *Scholars, Saints and Sufis in the Muslim World* commented:

> Such concentration on the Islamic modernists is understandable and even, to a degree, justifiable. If historians are largely interested in change over time it is not surprising that they should focus on those who advocate change and appear to be the pioneers of new social and intellectual movements rather than on those who, at first sight at least, appear simply to be doing traditional things in traditional ways.[43]

Moreover, the historiography of modern Islamic thought, including Arab-Islamic thought, has been exhaustive but repetitious. Intellectual historians have turned repeatedly to the same ideas and the same thinkers. The

---

[43] Nikki R. Keddie (ed.) *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972): 5.

alphabet of modern history would automatically include the names of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni, Muhammad `Abduh, Rashīd Rida, `Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibi and other reformers, who got "positively" engaged in the process of modernization. Thinkers or scholars who were not advocates of reform have remained, more or less, outside the scope of intellectual interest.

Keddie's quotation summarizes the general attitude of the majority of historians dealing with issues of modernity in the Muslim World.[44] Perceiving "modernity" as the ultimate goal of societies, historians have been tracing its impact and process in Muslim societies since the early twentieth century. Their works have been shaped by the controversy on the relation between modernity and Islam, which in turn have been presented as two distinct "forces of history", sometimes separate, sometimes complementary, and sometimes interrelated.[45] For early speculators on these two elements, the "forces" seemed too distinct to be historically interrelated and consequently, "modernity" seemed to have caused a rupture and discontinuation in Muslim history, causing an unprecedent "renaissance" in Islamic socieities. Studies on "Modern" Islamic thought in the Muslim world in general, and the Arab Middle East in specific, were the first building blocks of this historiography. The first interest originated from the missionary writers and Orientalists mainly trained at the center of Oriental Studies at the University of Chicago.

---

[44] With respect to the context of the thesis as a whole, the definition of "Modernity" would be that of Geertz, describing it as "... a process, a sequence of occurrences that transforms a traditional form of life, stable and self-contained, into a venturous one, adaptive and continuously changing. Clifford Geertz. *After the Fact: Two Countries, Three Decades, One Anthropologist*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 137.

[45] See, for more analysis, Armando Salvatore. *Islam and the political Discourse of Modernity*. (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1997).

The early documentation of the modern religious attitude to modernization is to be found starting in 1910 in the missionary journal *The Moslem World*, and more specifically in the articles of Duncan Black MacDonald. Charles Adams started the first serious academic investigation on modernism and Islam in a Ph.D. dissertation submitted in August 1923. The first half of the dissertation was then published in 1933 under the title *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*. Setting `Abduh as the leader of the reform movement, he described it as follows:

> It constitutes an attempt to free the religion of Islam from the shackles of a too rigid orthodoxy, and to accomplish reforms which will render it adaptable to the complex demands of modern life.[46]

His work was followed by Hamilton Gibb's *Modern Trends in Islam*, published in 1947. Gibb, like Adams was interested in the modern intellectual revolution in the Muslim world.[47] Gibb set modernity as one phase of religious tensions within Islam, and thus, transcendent to it. The work following the same outline was Malcolm Kerr's *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida*, published in 1966.[48] Kerr, like his tutor Gibb, saw in Islam a tension between "Ideal and actuality, the spiritual and the temporal, virtue and power, God's command and man's

---

[46] Charles C. Adams. *Islam and Modernity in* Egypt*: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad `Abduh.* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1933): 1.
[47] H. A. R. Gibb. *Modern Trends in Islam*. (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975).
[48] Malcolm H. Kerr. *The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida*. (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

behavior", a tension that has been sharpened by the spread of "modern ambiguities."[49]

Until then, "Orientalists" dominated the academic field until Muslim and/or Arab historians and writers responded. Albert Hourani, the Arab historian at Oxford, published his *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* in 1962. It was a comprehensive study of modern political and social, secular and Muslim thought in the Arab Middle East since the mid-nineteenth century. Rather than elaborating on the "tension" between modernity and Islam, Hourani analyzed the "conscience assimilation" of Arab and Muslim thinkers to modernity. Multidisciplinarity as well, giving room to religious and economic histories, left its impact on this historiography. Thus, in 1965, the University of Chicago founded its Center for Middle Eastern Studies, which was combined with its Oriental Institute. Their first conference *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century,* was held in the following year. The approach of the conference was more multi-disciplinary and historians from various fields participated. The relevant works were those of Hourani and his student Afaf Marsot al-Sayyid, whose presentations were published in the proceedings in 1968.[50] Hourani's "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of the Notables" was an original contribution to the role of the `Ulama in the period of *Tanzimāt*. In a new contribution, Hourani emphasized on the role of religious notables in responding to modernity. Hourani dealt with the power the group of the "notables" enjoyed in the

---

[49] Ibid: 1.
[50] William R. Polk & Richard L. Chambers. *Beginnings of Modernization.*

Ottoman Dynasty, mainly in the Syrian and Iraqi provinces, where the social status of the `Ulama extended its religious influence. Marsot, in "The Beginning of Modernization among the Rectors of al-Azhar, 1798-1879" shed light on the opposition to educational reforms in al-Azhar, headed by conservative scholars. She sketched the different attempts to modernize its system since the eighteenth century, and explained the strategy of opposition among its 'Ulama. A similar contribution to the role of the `Ulama institution was *Scholars, Saints and* Sufis in 1972, edited by Nikki Keddie, who published her important bibliography, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography*[51] in the same year.

Yet it was impossible to study modernity in the Middle East without studying one of its major "phenomena": nationalism, and more importantly the reaction of the religious elite to nationalism. In the early 70's, Jacob Landau found a manuscript by `Aref al-Munayyir, a court `Alem, and translated it into *The Hijaz Railway and the Muslim Pilgrimage*.[52] Although al-Munayyir's background and conservative affiliation should have attracted some interest, Landau's interest was more in the National "Arab" contribution to Ottoman policy than in the religious conservative support to the Sultan:

> Little research, if any, appears to have been devoted to the attitudes and activities of those Arabs who were partial to Turkish rule, whether out of Islamic conviction, socio-economic considerations, or personal interest. Such research was evidently of less concern to the twentieth-century historians interested particularly in the origins and growth of the Arab national movement.[53]

---

[51] Nikki R. Keddie. *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
[52] Jacob Landau. *The Hejaz Railway and the Muslim Pilgrimage: A Case of Ottoman Political Propaganda.* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971).
[53] Ibid:18.

Another essential work in the field of Arab nationalism was *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism* by Philip Khoury.[54]

The consistent dilemma between modernity and the Third World, to which all Muslim societies allegedly belong, and the attention given to the Islamic "revival" and "resurgence" in these societies since the 1970's, produced a "revisionist" historiography on the relation between Islam and modernity. Islam was no longer perceived as "victim" of the changes, withering under the impact of modernity, but instead as able to accommodate to these changes and even instigate them. Stagnation, it has been argued, has never been a characteristic of the Muslim world, and the twentieth century Islamic resurgence is not a "modern" movement per se, but a continuation of earlier movements going back to the eighteenth century. Fazlur Rahman's view of Muslim history as a chain of continuous vital changes[55] and his suggestion that the eighteenth century should be studied as the prelude to the nineteenth-century reform movement[56] saw the first response in *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*.[57] Some historians have even argued that the Wahhabi movement itself was part of the genesis of Islamic revivalism.[58] Neo-Sufism as well has been embedded within the same context of Islamic vitality. That both movements Neo-Sufism

---

[54]Philip Khoury. *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[55] Fazlur Rahman. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1982).
[56] Fazlur Rahman. *Islam*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
[57] Nehemia Levtzion & John O. Voll (eds.) *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*.

and Wahhabism, though perceived as oppositing each other, were looking differently at an ideal Muslim society, challenged the thesis on the "stagnation" of Muslim societies. The works of Frederick de Jong on the Orders in Egypt in 1978,[59] followed by Julian Johanson' s *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt* in 1996,[60] unveiled the early attempts of Sufi Orders to adjust themselves to changes throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Meanwhile John Voll focused on the relationship between the conservative brotherhoods, which resisted western imperialism, and the later national movements in the twentieth century, with emphasis on Africa and the Soviet Union.[61]

The argument about "change" and "stagnation" in Islam had necessarily to draw interest in *Ijtihād* and *Taqlīd*. The importance of these two issues relied on their legal hermeneutics. While *Taqlīd* is the practice of imitation of what has been already interpreted in Islamic jurisprudence, *Ijtihād* is believed to be a creative instrument, which enables scholars to adapt to any new situation. If *Ijtihād* is proven to have been a frequent and continuous practice in Islamic history, then this implies that Islam has not experienced stagnation, on the contrary, it has constantly been "updated". Peter Rudolph's article on *Ijtihād* and *Taqlīd*[62] shed light not only on the

---

[58] Wiliam Roff. "Islamic movements: one or many?" *Islam and the Political Economy of meaning*. William Roff (ed.). (London: Groom Helm, 1987).
[59] F. De Jong. *Turuq and Turuq-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Historical Study in Organizational Dimensions of Islamic Mysticism*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).
[60] Julian Johansen. *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*.
[61] John Obert Voll. "Conservative and traditional Brotherhoods.": 66-78.
[62] Rudolph Peters. "Ijtihād and Taqlīd in 18th and 19th Century Islam." *Die Welt des Islams* 20(1980): 132-145.

interest of Muslim thinkers in *Ijtihād* throughout the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, but also on the relation between this tradition of *Ijtihād* and twentieth-century Islamic revivalism. He concluded that

> The texts [on *Ijtihād*] contain a wealth of quotations reproducing fragments of earlier discussions on this issue. Further research may yield interesting results... Therefore, they are mines of information, that can give us some insight in the historical process of "the closing of the door of *Idjtihad*", a process of which we still know very little, and provide us with a solid starting-point for further investigations.[63]

Peters' expectation was further studied by Wael Hallaq, whose famous article on the (non)closing gate of *Ijtihād* forcibly argued in favor of an uninterrupted tradition of *Ijtihād* throughout Muslim history. Ghulam Fareed, in his anatomy of *Ijtihād*, relied on the same thesis, but mainly discussed the use of *Ijtihād* by twentieth-century Islamic movements and their different approaches to its practice.[64]

Yet the discourse about Islam and modernity has largely remained confined to the dichotomy of whether Muslim societies have been stagnant and then revived by "modernity" or whether "modernity" is nothing but a phase in a continuous changing Muslim world. So far, attempts to revitalize Islamic thought "had to be related either to European modernity through the agitation of the keyword of *nahda* ("renaissance"), or to the formative period of Islam, on the basis of the concept of *islah* ("reform"), or to a blend of both."[65] Studying Islamic thought beyond the influence of this dichotomy has

---

[63] Ibid: 144.
[64] Muneer Goolam Fareed. *Legal Reform in the Muslim World: The Anatomy of a Scholarly Dispute in the Nineteenth and the Early twentieth Centuries on the Usage of Ijtihad as a Legal Tool.* (San Francisco: Austin & Winfield, 1996).
[65] Armando Salvatore. *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*: 75.

not been recognized yet as part of the discourse on "Islam and modernity". There exists, or at least existed, a movement within Islam which located modernity neither in the scope of "renaissance" nor in the chain of "reform". For this movement, which I refer to as the conservative movement, Islam and modernity were not only distinct but also separate, not only incompatible but parallel and irreconcilable. However, little attention has been given to this movement and its dignitaries, and at best, works related to it have been located in a different context. An interesting period to study this movement is the Hamidien one. As aforementioned, the policy of Pan-Islam launched by `Abd al-Hamīd and his reliance on conservative Sufi leaders provided an opportunity to raise their voices against modernity, along with attempts to reconcile Islam with it. Another important characteristic of the period is that it anteceded the period of intensified modernization[66] in the Muslim world throughout the twentieth century.[67]

Abu Manneh's article on the conservative dignitary and `Abd al-Hamīd's advisor Abu al-Huda al-Sayyādi, drew the first picture of a religious conservative movement involved in political propaganda for `Abd al-Hamīd. However, Abu Manneh confined himself to its role in the anti-nationalism campaign of the Sultan.[68] Rudolph Peters' s article "Religious Attitudes

---

[66] I deliberately use the term "modernization" instead of modernity since "modernization" is believed to lead to modernity, and thus is quite different from it.
[67] The significance of this is that "modernization" was imposed at all levels in attempts to reach "modernity". This, as I mentioned before, changed facets of all Islamic movements in the Muslim World, movements that became, voluntarily or not, involved in the process of "modernization".
[68] B. Abu Manneh. . "Sultan `Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies* 15(1979).

Towards Modernization in the Ottoman Empire,"[69] was a breakthrough which exposed a different religious point of view, rejecting all aspects of modernization in the Ottoman dynasty. Summarizing the historiography related to the late Ottoman Dynasty Peters argued:

> The historiography of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century is mainly concerned with the process of modernization and change. There is an abundance of studies on the measures of reform that were introduced in the fields of warfare, education, law administration and communication, and on the men and the ideas behind them. But information on the forces of opposition and their leaders and ideologies is difficult to find. This, of course, is a result of the outcome of the historical process. Since the forces of modernization have been victorious, they have determined the vision of history. And in this vision there is little room for the losers.[70]

He attempted to broaden "the vision of history" by explicating an original text by a conservative Turkish Sheikh who saw steamship and telegraph as leading to blasphemy.

The Ottoman archives are a rich source of providing information on this period. Selim Deringil's early studies on the "legitimacy structures" of `Abd al-Hamīd[71] and his recent book on "ideology and legitimation of power" in the late Ottoman Dynasty are insightful examinations of different aspects of the policy to promote pan-Islam. Such details were helpful to contextualize some of the conservatives' activities during `Abd al-Hamīd's reign.

---

[69] Rudolph Peters. Religious Attitudes Towards Modernization in the Ottoman Empire: A nineteenth century pious text on steamships, factories and the telegraph." *Die Welt des Islams* 26(1986): 76-105.
[70] Rudolph Peters. "Religious Attitudes": 76.
[71] Selim Deringil. "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909). *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23(1991): 346-359, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808-1908" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 35(1993): 1-27.

The work of David Commins, Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria was a milestone in the field. He revealed the social and political differences between the "reformers" and "conservatives", analyzing their motivations for supporting or resisting. However, the aim of the book was not to produce a work on the conservative movement but rather to study the writings of another Damascene reformer, namely Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimi.[72]

In spite of the scarcity of works on religious conservatism, this "unbalance" in the historiography persisted in the 1990's, and was reflected in a quotation of Hourani's article "How should we write the History of the Middle East":

> Those of us who wrote in this way tended to neglect other thinkers who did not accept ideas coming from Europe, or who, if they accepted them, tried to incorporate them within a framework of thought which still relied on traditional categories and methods.[73]

My argument is that to be able to understand the Muslim reaction to modernity and "write the History of the Middle East" we should look beyond the "appeal" to modernity and recognize the existence of a conservative movement (at least at the end of the Ottoman era), which "did not accept ideas coming from Europe" and did not, at any point, think of complementing Islam with modernity or vice versa, or of compensating the "heritage" of Islam with it. The thesis goes beyond the "orientalist" or the "revisionist" historiography, and addresses a movement that was neither part of "renaissance" nor of "reform", but which was opposed to these two concepts

---

[72] Commins. *Islamic Reform*.

and what they could imply in terms of adaptation of a "dogmatic" religion to "pragmatic" changes --an adaptation, as the following chapters will reveal, had been perceived by Muslim conservatives to have had the power to destroy Islam. Within this context of the conservative and reform dichotomy, analyzing the politics of conservatism and its alliance with the Ottoman Sultan becomes more comprehensive. The activities of this movement during the Hamidien period, thus, go beyond anti-nationalism and anti-imperialism, and focus instead on anti-Muslim reform. Their resort to religious discourse and their arguments within its parameters, their use of Prophetic reports to rally Muslim support for the Sultan, their refutation of *Ijtihād* -the tool by which reforms would be legitimized- and the "signs of heresy" they attributed to the reformers, constitute the nucleus of these politics.

---

[73]Albert Hourani. "How should we write the History of the Middle East?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23(1991): 125-136.

Chapter II

Yūsuf al-Nabhāni: Conservatism in service of `Abd al-Hamīd

Introduction

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a group of Ottoman bureaucrats in Istanbul, the Young Ottomans, led by the former grand vizier and president of the State Council Midhat pasha, raised the issue of a parliamentary regime to replace the ultimate authority of the Ottoman Sultan. The Young Ottomans, who were widely read in Western sources, sought to strengthen the relation between the Ottoman ruler and all his subjects, Muslims and non-Muslims, on the basis of their legal representation. Upon his ascension in 1876, the Sultan `Abd al-Hamīd II responded to the pressure of the bureaucrats and established the constitution in the same year to call for a parliament. `Abd al-Hamīd probably accepted the proclamation of the constitution as a temporary policy, but did not seem to be a 'true' believer in its efficiency for a Dynasty holding different ethnic and religious communities together, a situation further complicated by manipulations of the European Powers. The Russo-Ottoman war (1877-78), that resulted in the surrender of the Ottomans, motivated `Abd al-Hamīd to prorogue the parliament and suspend the constitution under the pretext that the parliament had functioned improperly during the crisis. The Sultan conceived of a different relationship with his subjects, a relationship "based on the newly forged aura of the institution of

the caliphate rather than on a contractual agreement inspired by Europe."[1] Ottomanism, expressed by the bureaucrats as upholding political equality of all subjects of the Dynasty, failed to prevent the dismemberment of the latter. Now that the majority of the Dynasty's subjects was Muslim (as a consequence of the secessions of the Balkans in 1870's), `Abd al-Hamīd's emphasis was on Islam and on his role as the "Caliph" of Muslims. The purpose of this new pan-Islam policy was many-fold. Besides its foreign policy objectives, it "availed [itself] of Islamic symbols and upheld the Ottoman State's Islamic identity and the Muslim subjects' morale following losses in war."[2] Moreover, it was a counter-appeal to separatist or nationalist trends in the Ottoman provinces in general and the Arab provinces in particular. There, two separatist movements in Syria raised the suspicions of the Sultan. The first was led by a Christian Lebanese, Faris Nimr, who was trying to rally both Muslims and Christians against the "Turkish" regime. The second was a group of Muslim notables who were seeking independence or autonomy of Syria, albeit with recognition of the Ottoman Sultan. The Sultan's emphasis on his role as "Caliph" of the Muslims, he thought, would rally Muslims around him and generate their support from within and outside his Dynasty.[3]

Yet, this time the opposition to the Sultan and to his claim to be the "Caliph" of the Muslims was challenged not by Arab notables, but by Arab

---

[1] Kayali. *Arabs and Young Turks*: 30.
[2] S. Tufan Buzpinar. "Abdulhamid II, Islam and the Arabs: The Cases of Syria and Hijaz (1878-1882)." (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 1991): 314-15, as quoted in Kayali: 31.
[3] Following his consolidating program, `Abd al-Hamīd was successfully able to win the support of Arab Muslim notability. Ibid: 35.

religious intellectuals, known as Muslim reformers. They held the Ottomans responsible for the deviation from true Islam, which, they argued, had led to the decline of the Muslim rule. They were more conscious of the "Arab" role in early Islam and its contribution to Islamic civilization. Their "Arab" consciousness was carried further by denying `Abd al-Hamīd the right to be the "Caliph" of the Muslims.

The term "Caliph" that `Abd al-Hamīd resorted to in his pan-Islam policy had a specific religious and political significance. In Islamic politics, there is a difference between a Sultan and a Caliph. A Caliph, according to the classical political theory, has not only a religious symbol but also a dynastic one: the Caliph must be of the Quraysh lineage.[4] Yet the need to accommodate powerful Muslim rulers from Mongol and Turkish origins from the thurteenth century had led to a more pragmatic interpretation of the term "Caliphate".[5] Thus, for the Ottoman Sultans, who became the inheritors of Muslim rule, the Caliphate no longer implied descent from the house of the Prophet, or membership of the Quraysh lineage. Thus the Quranic verse: {And we have made you a *Khalifa* on the earth,}[6] did not, for them, designate a successor of the Prophet, but rather a vicegerent of God since Sultans, as Muslim rulers, claimed to derive their authority directly from God. As a result, "the title of Caliph passed from the supreme authority who used to nominate Sultans, to any Sultan who cares to assume a designation once held to be unique."[7] The title "Caliph" was rarely used in official descriptions

---

[4] For more details, see Kerr. *Islamic Reform:* chapter 2.
[5] See Ann K. S. Lambton. *State and Government in Medieval Islam*. (London:1985).
[6] *Qur'an*. "Chapter XXXVIII": 25.
[7] T. W. Arnold. *The Caliphate*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924): 129, and Malcolm

of the Ottoman Sultans with the exception of the sixteenth century, when the Ottomans conquered the Hijaz and claimed for themselves the sovereignty over Mecca and Medina, followed by pursuing a broader recognition outside their Dynasty, and more particularly in Indonesia, India and Central Asia.[8] The interest in the title was renewed in the late eighteenth century and more significantly in the nineteenth century by `Abd al-Hamīd, who inserted this claim in the Constitution promulgated in 1876.[9] He used the title to assert his position as the ultimate and unchallenged ruler of the Muslims and to further promote pan-Islam, which "became an ideological weapon wielded by the sultan to counter the imperialism of the western powers as well as the minority nationalist movements that threatened the empire."[10] Although many Sultans before him emphasized the title of Caliph for political benefit[11], `Abd al-Hamīd was the first among the Ottoman Sultans to use it, in addition, for a spiritual authority "no longer dependent upon possession of the sinews of power."[12]

To refute the claims of the reformers, `Abd al-Hamīd, as discussed in chapter I, relied on the conservative Sufis, the opponents of religious reforms. Among those who appealed to the Sultan's efforts was Yūsuf al-

---

Kerr. *Islamic Reform*. Chap. II.

[8] See Kramer. *Islam Assembled*: 4-5.

[9] Ibid: 173. This is found in Article 3 as follows: "The Sublime Ottoman Sultanate, which possesses the Supreme Islamic Caliphate, will appertain to the eldest of the descendants of the house," and in Article 4: "His Majesty the Sultan, as Caliph, is the protector of the Muslim religion."

[10] Shaw: *History of the Ottoman Empire:* 260. See also Kayali. *Arabs and Young Turks* and Selim Deringil. *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909*. (London: I. B. Taurus, 1998).

[11] Sultan Selim, for example, made this title a focal point in his politics after the conquest of Egypt and the Fertile Crescent.

[12] Kramer: *Islam Assembled:* 6.

Nabhāni, [13] an overlooked prominent anti-reform polemicist and a devout defender of Sufism, who contributed to the debate with reformers and helped understand much of its details.

Yūsuf al-Nabhāni : Religious Background and Political Affiliation

The life of al-Nabhāni is known from his autobiography[14] and from other biographical dictionaries whose authors either met al-Nabhāni or heard of him. Yūsuf ibn Isma`īl ibn Yūsuf ibn Isma`īl ibn Muhammad Nāser al-Dīn al-Nabhāni was born in 1850 in Ijzim, a Palestinian village in the district of Nablus.[15] He received his primary religious education from his father who taught him the Qur`an and the Tradition (*hadīth*). After he turned seventeen he left to attend *al-Azhar* University in Cairo,[16] where he spent seven years after which he returned to Palestine to teach in *al-Jazzār* mosque in Acre. Al-Nabhāni's first decisive years were those spent in *al-Azhar* University. In the late nineteenth century, *al-Azhar* was still a fortress of Muslim conservatism, opposing any religious reform: "...the nineteenth century, bringing

---

[13] Al-Nabhāni was one among many Sufi and conservative scholars who appealed to the Hamidien policy. Among those who visited Istanbul at the time and seem to have enjoyed `Abd al-Hamīd's courtesy were, to mention but a few names, `Ala` al-Dīn `Abdīn (d. 1888) of the Khalwatiyya Order, Saleh Taqiy al-Dīn (d. 1893) of the Rifa`iyya Order, who became the *Naqīb al-Ashrāf* (head of the notables) in Damascus in 1889, Saleh al-Munayyir (d. 1903), Mahmud al-Muwaqqi`(d. 1903), Abu al-Nasr al-Khatīb (d. 1906), `Aref al-Munayyir (d. 1923) who wrote the famous tract on the Hijaz Railway and dedicated it to `Abd al-Hamīd. See al-Hafez. *Tārīkh `Ulamā' Dimashq*. These scholars and *Sheikhs* were considered at the time the backbone of the politico-religious support and propaganda for the Hamidien rule among Muslims in geographical Syria in general and Sufi Orders in specific.

[14] His autobiography was mentioned in his following book: Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Hādi al-murīd ila turuq al-asānīd*. (n. p, n. d.).

[15] Nablus at the time was part of *Wilayat* Beirut.

[16] *Al-Azhar* is the oldest and the most prestigious mosque-University in the Muslim world. Besides, it is one of the most authoritative voices in Islamic history. See, for more information, Bayard Dodge. *Al-Azhar: A Millenium of Muslim Learning*.

Westernization in its wake, caused *al-Azhar* to fear modernization of any kind."[17] It shaped his religious and intellectual affiliation and sharpened his traditional knowledge, which was enforced by the traditional curriculum taught there[18] although he had the opportunity to listen to, and meet with, Muslim reformers like al-Afghāni.

One year after his graduation from *al-Azhar*, the career of al-Nabhāni seems to have taken a new turn. He was chosen by the Ottoman authorities for a judicial position in Nablus in Palestine. In 1876, he traveled to Istanbul for two years and held an editorial position in the official periodical *al-Jawā`ib*[19]. That an Arab, and particularly an Arab scholar, visited Istanbul and hold an official post in one of its state-sponsored periodicals reflected the

---

(Washington: Middle East Institute, 1961).

[17] Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot. "The Beginnings of Modernization among the rectors of al-Azhar 1798-1879," *Beginning of Modernization in the Middle East:* 280.

[18] Rational sciences had been neglected and gradually removed from the *al-Azhar* curricula from the seventeenth century on. Attempts to reform the situation started with Muhammad `Ali Pasha, governor of Egypt, and were continued by several Azhirite Ulama but their efforts were fruitless in the face of the massive opposition among the conservative *`Ulama*. For more details see Afaf Marsot al-Sayyid. "Modernization among the rectors of *al-Azhar*, 1798-1879": 149-165

[19] *Al-Jawā'ib* was one of the most influential journals of the century. It was established by Fares al-Shidyaq (1801-1887), a Maronite convert to Protestantism and then to Islam. He acquired the reputation of a good writer and an expert on Arabic language whose efforts along with those of Ibrahīm al-Yāziji upgraded the Arabic of the press. His journal was launched in Istanbul on 31May 1861. As a result of financial crisis in the journal it became fully sponsored by the Ottoman government after rescuing it. Al-Shidyāq was subsidized to five hundred pounds a year and was invited to print it at the state press "in return for which he defended the imperial point of view". By the end, *al-Jawā'ib* was among the few Syrian publications that were tolerated by the Sultan. See *The press in the Arab World:* 30 and Caesar Farah. "Censorship and Freedom of Expression in Ottoman Syria and Egypt," *Nationalism in a Non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire*. William Haddad & William Ochsenwald (eds.) (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977): 154. al-Nabhāni also praised al-Shidyāq in a poem published in *al-Jawa'ib*. See *Kanz al-raghā'ib fi muntakhabāt al-Jawā'ib*. Vol.4. (Istanbul: Matba`at al-Jawā'ib, 1877): 137-140. However, when asked later about his talent of eulogy, he admitted he regretted this practice. See al-`Awdat: *Min a`lām al-fikr wa al-adab*: 618.

new policy of `Abd al-Hamīd towards the Arab provinces.[20] Later al-Nabhāni was appointed a judge in a district in Kurdistan, but left after fifteen months. After a short visit to Baghdad and Damascus he returned in 1880 to Istanbul for two years during which he became one of the court `Ulama of `Abd al-Hamīd II. His close relation to the Ottoman ruler culminated in lucrative judicial posts. He was appointed the head of the court of first instance in Latakia and then in Jerusalem. There he met Hasan Abi Halāwa al-Ghazzi,[21] who introduced him into the Qadiriyya Order, and who seems to have secured him a promotion in 1888 as the head of the civil tribunal in Beirut. He remained in this position until he was dismissed in 1909, following the Young Turks' revolution against `Abd al-Hamīd in 1908.[22] He went to Medina

---

[20] See Chapter I for more details on this policy.

[21] Al-Ghazzi was an influential Sufi of the Qadiriyya Order (an Order believed to have been founded by `Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni (d. 1166), from Jilān in Persia) in Jerusalem. When al-Nabhāni told him he was not satisfied with his career in Jerusalem, al-Ghazzi assured him he was on his way to receive a promotion for a better job, and this was going to be first confirmed in a dream, which al-Nabhāni claimed he saw. Al-Nabhāni was promoted within few months as the head of the civil tribune in Beirut. He commented that he received this promotion as a "grace", "with no prior knowledge or effort on his behalf." See Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Jāmi` karāmāt al-awliyā'*. Vol. II. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, 1991): 43. In spite al-Nabhāni's claim that the promotion was "accidental" the influence of the Qādiriyya Order during the period is to be questioned here. Al-Qadiriyya in Jerusalem, or in geographic Syria in general, must have been favored by the Ottoman authorities. Some sources have already mentioned the Qadiriyya role in Egypt. See . De Jong. *Turuq and Turuq-Linked* Institutions. Al-Ghazzi obviously was the one who interfered on behalf of al-Nabhāni to receive this promotion. This can be an additional source on the influence of the Qadiriyya in the nineteenth century, an influence that could be similar to that of the Rifa`iyya Order. For more information on the Rifa`iyya, see the discussion below.

[22] It was said by some, mainly his enemies, that he was dismissed from his job at the tribunal because he abused his position. Al-Nabhāni was aware of these accusations and he defended himself in one of his later books saying that he never "used a judgement against the Shari`a or for any personal purpose. [He] tried to be just in all his capacity and knowledge." See *Al-Dalālāt al-wādihāt: Hāshiya mukhtasara `ala dalā'il al-khayrāt wa yalīha al-mubashirāt al-manamiyya nabawiyya wa ghayr nabawiyya*. (Cairo: Mataba`at Mustapha Babi al-Halabi, 1955): 5. He even mentioned a dream, to support his claim, in which he saw his court near that of 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the Caliph who is famous among Muslims for his

and then returned to his home village in 1916 after the revolt of Sharif Husayn.[23] He died in Beirut in 1932.[24]

The prosperous career of al-Nabhāni seemed to have been shaped by his Sufi network, facilitated by his indoctrination in several Sufi Orders[25] and his familiarity with their influential leaders. Al-Ghazzi may well have been but one link in this chain, which included Abu al-Huda al-Sayyādi, the head of the Rifa`iyya Order in Syria, to whom al-Nabhāni also owed much of his good fortune.

Abu al-Huda al-Sayyādi[26] was born in 1850 in Khān Shaykhūn in Aleppo. The Sayyādi family was distinguished and famous in the vicinity, and his maternal great grandfather, Ali Khuzām (1763-40) was known to be a

---

justice. Ibid. For al-Nabhāni, this was the strongest possible "proof" of his honesty and justice since dreams, especially for Sufis, are regarded as one of the ways by which a divine "message" can be revealed to pious people. However, there is no doubt that the Young Turks dismissed him because of his previous affiliation with the Hamidien regime.

[23] Sharif Husayn who was appointed by `Abd al-Hamīd in 1908 as prince of Mecca, revolted against Ottoman authorities in June 1916, and declared an independent Hijaz.

[24] Abd al-Hafīz al-Fāsi. *Mu`jam al-shuyūkh al-musamma riyād al-janna aw al-mudhish al-mutrib* Vol. 2(Ribat: al-Matba`a al-Wataniyya, 1931): 160-167; `Abd al-Razzāq al-Bitār. *Hilyat al-bashar fi tārikh al-qarn al-thālith `ashar*, Vol. 3. (Damascus: Matbu`āt al-Majma` al-`Arabi, 1963): 1612-1616; `Adil Manna`. *A`lām filastīn fi awākhir al-`ahd al-`uthmāni 1800-1918*, 2nd edition. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filastiniyya, 1995): 349-352; `Umar Kahhala. *Mu`jam al-mu'allifin*, vol. 13. (Damascus, Matba'at al-Taraqqi, 1961): 275-276; Ya`kub al-`Awdat (al-Badawi al-Mulatham). *Min A`lām al-fikr wa al-adab fi filastīn*. (Amman, Jam`iyyat `Ummāl al-Matābi` al-Ta`awuniyya, 1976): 617-622; and Zaki Muhammad Mujāhid. *Al-A`lām al-sharqiyya fi al-mā'a al-rābi`a `ashrata al-hijriyya*. Vol. 2, 2sd. Ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmi, 1974). See also al-Nabhāni 's autobiography in *Hādi al-murīd ila turuq al-asānid*: 56-58; and al-Nabhāni. *Shawāhid al-haq fi al-istighātha bi sayyid al-khalq*. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990): 3-10.

[25] According to al-Fāsi, one of al-Nabhāni's biographers, who met al-Nabhāni in Beirut in 1906, al-Nabhāni was indoctrinated in the Idrisiyya, Shaziliyya, Naqshbandiyya, Qādiriyya, Rifā`iyya and Khalwatiyya. `Abd al-Hafīz al-Fāsi. *Riyād al-janna*: 165-66. Al-Nabhāni also mentioned that he was initiated in the Tijāniyya Order in Beirut. See Al-Nabhāni: *Al-majmu`a al-Nabhāniyya*, vol.4: 470.

[26] That was a nickname for Muhammad b. Hasan Wadi b. `Ali. The chain of names

Sufi with supernatural powers. Abu al-Huda's father who sent him to a local Sheikh to read, write and learn the Quran, introduced him to the Rifā'iyya order on which Abu al-Huda decided. The choice of this order was invoked by two factors. First, this order was very popular in Aleppo and was supported by the authorities. Second, after al-Sayyādi's family quarreled with a leading notable in Hamat, North of Syria, they were forced to leave their village. Seeking protection, they turned to Sheikh Baha' al-Dīn, the head of the Rifā'iyya order in Aleppo for help. The fact that this Sheikh was an influential notable, who later became the *Naqib al-Ashraf* (head of the Notables) of Aleppo, further shaped their decision. The family of Abu al-Huda enhanced its position by claiming to be a descendant of Ahmad al-Rifā'i, the founder of the Order, who is also considered to be a descendant of the Prophet. In addition to the title of *Sayyid* and the privileges that Abu al-Huda would enjoy if his claim of descent to Ahmad al-Rifa'i was approved, he would oversee the tomb of a local Rifa'i saint, Ahmad al-Sayyād and handle its endowment. After he was approved to the claim but denied the appointment, he tried his luck in Istanbul. Although his petition was turned down again he came back with an appointment as *Naqīb al-Ashrāf* in Jisr al-Shyghur near Aleppo. In four years, he was promoted to *Naqīb al-Ashrāf* of Aleppo itself. It seemed that his intelligence and piety opened doors in Istanbul, a step which later paved the way for al-Nabhāni. After the deposition of 'Abd al-'Azīz he was dismissed from the *Niqaba* in favor of Abdulmajid al-Mishati, who, after the position had been restored to al-Sayyādi shortly after, was exiled to Jaffa in Palestine for over thirty years. The *Haremeyn,* a high rank in the 'Ulama

---

reaches al-Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

hierarchy was awarded to al-Sayyādi following the restoration of the *Niqāba*, and about the end of 1876 he left to Istanbul where he was favorably received by the Sultan. Shortly after, he was appointed as *Sheikh al-Mashāyikh* (head of the *Sheikhs*) in Istanbul. He continued to be promoted in the hierarchy of the `Ulama until he received the grade of *Kazi-asker* of Rumeli, the highest degree in the `Ulama hierarchy. He established himself as a councilor to the Sultan and was considered as one of the principal ideologues of the court.

To become member of the `Ulama rank in the Ottoman era was highly respectable and prestigious, not to mention the economic advantages tp which an `*Alem* was entitled. The official title '*Alem* designated exemption from taxes and from confiscation of property after death. Their control over pious foundations, which could not be divided among heirs, allowed them to consolidate their holdings. All these economic privileges resulted in an accumulation of wealth and power, in addition to the social prestige. `Ulama who belonged to the judicial system were those who had a top level position. Although the *Tanzimāt* had taken some privileges away from the 'Ulama and weakened their economic and political role, `Abd al-Hamīd was providing them with a new opportunity. Moreover, he is known to have broken the established system by filling the `Ulama ranks with those who were in agreement with his policy

> that such honors gradually began to sink in popular esteem; and a young man who managed by some chance to land a good position was apt to find himself automatically suspect of being a palace agent.[27]

---

[27] Findley. *Bureaucratic Reform*: 235.

Al-Sayyādi was one of the fortunates who was, in return, promoting the policy of `Abd al-Hamīd in the Arab provinces and at the same time promoting the Sufi orders, mainly but not exclusively, the Rifā`iyya order, the members of which were excluded from military service.[28] Al-Sayyādi published extensively. Of his publications circulated in the Arab provinces between 1880 and 1908,[29] the most important was his poem on the Sultan. It was entitled *A Sensible Call to Unity and Obedience* and printed in Istanbul at the government press.[30] After conveying the message that absolute government was 'the' system of government in Islam, he called upon the Muslims to unite and obey the Sultan `Abd al-Hamīd who "after his ascendancy, showed religious zeal, upheld the Shari`a and worked for the protection of the Umma."[31] Those who criticized the Sultan became traitors.

Al-Nabhāni, for no obvious reason, did not mention al-Sayyādi or their friendship in any of his writings, but their cordial relations were described in other sources[32]. Al-Nabhāni arrived in Istanbul the same year al-Sayyādi did. Whether their simultaneous departure to Istanbul was planned or a mere coincidence is not clear, but it is likely that al-Nabhāni was among those who accompanied al-Sayyādi when he returned to Istanbul in 1876.[33] In any case, securing an editorial position at the government-sponsored periodical would

---

[28] Abu-Manneh: "`Abdulhamid II and Abulhuda al-Sayyadi":139. This was one way of earning the support of members of Sufi Orders.
[29] His publications are estimated to have reached 212 pamphlets and books Ibid: 140.
[30] Abu al-Huda Al-Sayyādi. *Da`i al-rashād li sabīl al-ittihād wa al-inqiyād.* (Istanbul, Al-Matba`a al-Sultāniyya, n. d.).
[31] Abu Manneh: "`Abdulhamid II and Abulhuda al-Sayyadi": 141
[32] His biographers as well as his opponents described their relation. See al-`Awdāt: *Min a`lam al-fikr wa al-adab:* 621, and Commins: *Islamic Reform:* 117.
[33] Al-Sayyādi returned to Istanbul with the companion of many `Ulama. See Abu

have necessitated the intercession of al-Sayyādi.[34] However, when al-Sayyādi was dismissed after the revolution of 1909, al-Nabhāni wrote a poem praising him and describing the deteriorating relations between Arabs and Turks.[35]

Text and Context: Al-Nabhāni in Hamidien Politics

The importance and significance of al-Nabhāni are derived from the nature of his writings, which make him the prominent polemicist in the modern conservative Sufi movement. His writings may be classified in three interdependent categories: prophetic eulogies, political propaganda and anti-religious reform polemics. Although the first was definitely the result of his intellectual formation and religious affiliation[36] it will be excluded from our study.[37] The second, political propaganda, includes two tracts: one on the

---

Manneh. "Abdulhamid II and Abulhuda Al-Sayyadi": 136.

[34] Ttheir relation did not last long since al-Nabhāni seemed to have affiliated himself during the last few years of `Abd al-Hamīd's rule with `Izzat Pasha al-`Abed, the rival of al-Sayyādi in the Hamidien court. Ahmad Pasha (1855-1924) was born in Damascus. He first was an advocate of reforms then left to Istanbul where he also entered the rank of the court Ulama, and became Abd al-Hamīd's secretary. See Khayr al-Dīn al-Zirikli. *Al-A`lam*. Vol. 9: 169-170.

[35] I was not able to locate this poem. However, the excerpts were mentioned in some biographies on al-Nabhāni. The poem seems to have been written after the dismissal of al-Sayyādi from Istanbul. In addition, although al-Nabhāni did not mention a third visit to Istanbul, one of the biographical dictionaries mentioned that the poem was written after a visit to Istanbul, probably after the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908. See `Awdat: 621. Al-`Awdat also mentioned that one of al-Nabhāni' s relatives told him that al-Nabhāni was given the opportunity to become the Mufti of Palestine under the British control but he refused because he would not be able to rule by the Islamic Shari`a. Ibid.

[36] Eulogies of the Prophet were a Sufi tradition, at which al-Nabhāni excelled. For more information on his contribution to this field, see Annemarie Schimmel. *And Muhammad is His Messenger*. (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1985).

[37] Excluding this category from our analysis does not imply that it is less important than the others. However, it does not fully belong to the context and framework of the thesis. Eulogies tradition, instead, should be analyzed as a separate Sufi literature, analyzing its origins, influences and purposes, stretching its time span

virtues and achievements of the Sultan `Abd al-Hamīd and the other on the missionary schools and their danger for Muslims. The last category includes books on the refutation of the practice of *Ijtihād* and of people who claimed its exercise, on the defense of Sūfi practices and beliefs, and on what he claimed to be the irreligion of the religious reformers.

His publications started to appear after he was appointed to the judicial position in Beirut. However, he did not get involved in the debates over the legitimacy of the Sultan as Caliph or over the religious reforms until the 1890's. Before that date, al-Nabhāni' s erudite talents were devoted to his editing of *al-Jawā'ib* only, and the Arabic books printed at its press. Even his first publication, *The Eternal Glory of the House of Muhammad*, published in 1891,[38] was not evidently a response to the political situation. The second publication, *Forty Hadiths in the Obligation to Obey The Prince of Believers,* however, was very significant and an expression of al-Nabhāni' s political position on the issue of the Caliphate and the legitimacy of the Sultan. It has three sections. The first was a collection of forty Prophetic Reports, the second was a rhythmic poem dedicated to the Sultan, and the third was al-Nabhāni 's commentary on the poem. It was published in May/June 1895 in Beirut as "an advice to the Muhammadan nation [*Umma*], and dedicated to the High Ottoman dynasty [*dawla*], which some people with knowledge considered the best state only after that of the Companions."[39] The poem

---

probably back to the Abbasid period.

[38] Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Al-Sharaf al-Mu'abbad li āli Muhammad.* (Egypt: Matba`at Mustafa al-Bābi al-Halabi, 1961). The book was devoted to the defense of the House of the Prophet.

[39] This is the statement on the cover of the book. See Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *al-Ahādith al-arba`īn fi wujūb ta`at amīr al-mu'minīn.* (Beirut: al-Matba`a al-Adabiyya,

was preceded by a compilation of fourty hadiths entitled "Forty Hadiths on the obligation to obey the Prince of the Believers and his Deputies"[40]. The first step al-Nabhāni took was to confirm the legitimacy of the hadiths by mentioning that they belonged to the categories of *sahīh* and *hasan.*[41] He then explained why he was committed to collect forty hadiths, stating that his purpose

> is to be one of those about whom the prophet said the following: 'Who keeps for my nation forty *hadiths* from its religion will be revived by God to be among the jurists and the scholars,' and the prophet's saying: 'He who keeps forty *hadiths* from my Tradition will be entered in My mediation on the day of judgement'.[42]

The opening of this collection was a verse from the Quran {Oh believers, obey God, the prophet and those in authority among you}.[43] Al-Nabhāni explained this verse as "it is meant by the rulers those from among rulers and princes to whom God made their obedience obligatory."[44] The selected sayings dealt with different issues concerning the relation between the ruler and the ruled, and mainly with the obligations and responsibilities of the latter toward the former. The reports pointed at a direct connection between obedience to the ruler and obedience to God and His Prophet. For example, if one disobeyed or obeyed the ruler, he was disobeying or obeying

---

1312/1895). He also mentioned that he himself paid the expenses of ten thousand copies of this treatise to be "distributed for free". Ibid. The comparison between these two periods has a big weight since the period of the Companions is considered the ideal rule of Islam. By setting the Ottoman Empire after it al-Nabhāni implied the justice and idealism that characterized that period.

[40] The collection of forty hadiths was a tradition used by al-Nabhāni in dealing with different subjects.

[41] However, al-Nabhāni mentioned at the end of the collection other books of Hadiths from which he chose his forty *hadīths*. See Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Ahādīth al-arba`īn:* 14.

[42] Ibid.: 2.

[43] Quran: "Chapter IV":59.

[44] Ibid: 3.

God and His Prophet[45]. Yet obedience was not only for the ruler but also for his appointees[46]. This, al-Nabhāni implied, was not a political option but performance of a religious duty. Even if the ruler were oppressive or not following the teachings of Islam, Muslims were not allowed to violate their allegiance to the ruler, which should be maintained under all circumstances.[47] Although disagreement was allowed, disobedience or revolt was not. The alternative for Muslims, according to the *hadiths*, was to remain patient, and advise the ruler since every ruler would usually have two kinds of people around him: those who offer good and those who offer bad advice.

Although some of the *hadīths* selected in the tract mentioned that obedience should be always maintained unless the ruler deviated from Islamic teachings, al-Nabhāni's comments on the *hadīth* implied that it should be maintained under all circumstances.[48] According to another *hadīth*, the fate of the disobedient who caused division among Muslims was death, and any rival of the ruler should be executed.[49] Al-Nabhāni 's choice of another *hadīth* was to repeat the description of the relation of the ruler to God, depicting it as sacred; thus, humiliating or respecting the ruler was humiliating or respecting God.[50] If Muslims had an oppressive ruler, it was because they had disobeyed the orders of God. The general principle, the *hadīth* continued, was that Muslims should have a just ruler unless they strayed. The Muslims who became subject to an oppressive rule should not

---

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid: 4-5.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid: 6-7.
[50] Ibid: 8-9.

spend their time denouncing the ruler, but they would rather spend it worshipping so that God reversed the situation. This was an attempt by al-Nabhāni to deny the Muslim opposition the right to argue against `Abd al-Hamīd.[51] Moreover, any call which was different from and strange to Islam, was a call from *Jāhiliyya* (the pre-Islamic period) and should be fought and resisted. For example, those who called for *`asabiyya*[52] or supported it would ultimately die a death appropriate to *Jāhiliyya*. Muslims should be careful under these circumstances because, according to one *hadīth*, there would come a day when Muslims would have divisive conditions. Then they should execute those who exploited the situation and caused division among Muslims.[53]

The poem, following the *hadīths,* continued in praise to `Abd al-Hamīd and his ancestors. If the purpose of the *hadīths* were to instruct the Muslims on their "lawful" relation and accepted behavior with their ruler, al-Nabhāni in the poem, defined more specifically who the ruler that he referred to was. Before he re-affirmed the legitimacy of `Abd al-Hamīd, he reminded his readers of the importance of the Ottomans in the history of Islam, and described him as "the *Mujaddid* (renewer) of the Ottoman dynasty. Being the "Caliph" of all the Muslims was unquestionable, a title to which `Abd al-Hamīd, in the eyes of al-Nabhāni, was fully entitled. For this purpose, he deliberately used the title "Caliph" to designate `Abd al-Hamīd throughout

---

[51] Ibid: 7-8.

[52] `Asabiyya can have several meanings. However, putting it in the context of the late nineteenth century, one would assume that al-Nabhāni thought of it in terms of Nationalism, which, in political terms, meant dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and in religious terms, meant allegiance to a state based on ethnic or linguistic homogeneity, rather than allegiance based on Islam.

the poem. He described him as the heir of the Ottoman State, the Ottomans' "distinguished member, and the one who renewed their honored state and its power, and he was the Caliph on behalf of Allah and the deputy of His Prophet."[54] If a strong Caliph were required, then `Abd al-Hamīd was well suited given his distinguished military abilities.[55] Al-Nabhāni saw him as a strong ruler when it came to protecting Islam, and like the Ottoman family, he was a war hero sent by God to strengthen and fortify the Islamic dynasty.[56] An example of the "Caliph" 's strength, al-Nabhāni continued, was the policy he had followed upon his accession to the throne. Here al-Nabhāni made his position on the *Tanzimāt* clear by praising `Abd al-Hamīd for "punishing the unjust and supporting the wise."[57] In fact, `Abd al-Hamīd always suspected the "liberal" tendencies of Midhat Pasha, who headed the call for a constitution and was a pro-*Tanzimāt* bureaucrat. Moreover, `Abd al-Hamīd suspected his role in the deposition and death of `Abd al-`Aziz and even his murder. He was exiled after the abolition of the constitution.

A detailed commentary on the virtues of the Sultan followed the poem. `Abd al-Hamīd was considered by al-Nabhāni the only Sultan whom believers "should support and defend if they really believe in God and his messenger."[58] Al-Nabhāni cited four reasons to rally Muslims around their ruler. The first one was based on religious legitimacy, since `Abd al-Hamīd

---

[53] Ibid: 6.
[54] Ibid: 16.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid. Al-Nabhāni referred here to `Abd al-Hamīd' s action against those who were accused of the murder of Sultan Murād, `Abd al-`Azīz' s successor. See Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire*:
[58] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Ahādīth al-arba`īn*: 18.

was the ruler of the believers, the protector of religion and the servant of Mecca and Medina.[59] Moreover, he was a devout *Mujtahid*[60] in the affairs of the state, exhausting himself for the sake of the Muslims."[61]

More significant was the political awareness al-Nabhāni displayed when he described the Sultan's efforts against colonialism in Muslim countries. He quoted a famous *hadīth*, used frequently to represent the Muslims' situation in the age of colonialism, saying: "Nations would gather around you [Muslims] as they gather around their kettle."[62] Thus, al-Nabhāni made it a duty for every Muslim to pray for the ruler, serve his state sincerely, and pray frequently for his victory and success. Those who objected to the ruler, al-Nabhāni continued, lacked reason and devotion, spending their time only arguing about what their Sultan should be doing. Addressing the Sufis, al-Nabhāni regularized their ties to the Sultan in quoting al-Sha`rāni[63] on how Sufis should deal with their rulers. His advice was to honor the rulers, kiss their hands and stand in their presence. Being polite with them is "to be polite with the greatest Sultan [God], who made them our Sultans."[64]

The second reason was the devotion that `Abd al-Hamīd showed for

---

[59] Ibid.
[60] A *Mujtahid* is the one who exercises *Ijtihād*. A major characteristic of a *Mujtahid* is the effort he should put to find a proper answer for a legal issue. It is doubtful that al-Nabhāni implied here the "legal" responsibilities of the Sultan, but rather referred to the "political" ones.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid. The *hadīth* has been widely circulated among Muslims in the last century. It is believed to be a prophecy about the weakness that will characterize the Muslims, caused by their indifference to Islamic guidance, and resulting in their vulnerability to "non-Muslims".
[63] Al-Sha`rani (1493-1565), the Egyptian mystic, is considered one of the great last thinkers before the general cultural decline in the Arab world. See Michael Winter. *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of `Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani.* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1982).
[64] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Ahādīth al-Arba`īn*: 19.

"the *Ashrāf* (descendants of the Prophet), scholars, Sufis and Poor, on whom he had spent his own money."[65] More significant for the author was the special care provided for the tombs of the prophets and saints, and the building of thousands of new mosques and schools in all parts of the Empire.[66] Al-Nabhāni gave the example of Latakia in modern day Syria, where the Sultan "had built seventy mosques, beside each a school headed by a Muslim Sheikh for the purpose of guiding the Nusayris.[67]

The Sultan's political consciousness and military readiness were the third reason that made obedience to him obligatory for Muslims. To apply the following Quranic verse: {Make ready for them all you can of [armed] force and of horses, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of Allah and your enemy...},[68] the Sultan, al-Nabhāni added, built many castles and forts, renovated military ships, firearms and all the tools of *Jihād*, and organized the army.[69] By fortifying the Muslim nation "he pleased God, His Prophet and the Muslims."[70]

The fourth reason was his "honorable" lineage, being a member of the 'Uthman family,

> "the greatest of the Sultans of Islam who served Islam, supported the *Shari`a* for seven hundred years, carried great conquests -most significant being that of Constantinople-, caused the conversion of thousands who are now in the millions and thus pleased the believers of the Earth and the angels of heavens."[71]

---

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] The Nusayris are considered a Shi'i sect because they regard `Ali, the Prophet's cousin, with high esteem. They even believe in his divinity. An example of a Nusayri is the current president of Syria, Hafez al-Asad.
[68] Quran: "Chapter VIII": 60.
[69] Ibid: 20.
[70] Ibid: 21.
[71] Ibid.

Before they came to power, al-Nabhāni continued, the Muslims were dispersed and they [the Ottomans] united them. Moreover, they took care of the Two Holy Cities and Jerusalem, and the tombs of the prophets, and thus, "adding this to their other virtues, their conquests were similar to those of 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb's."[72] For all this,

> Muslims owed them, and loved them from one generation to the next. However, no one among the Muslims hated them unless he was hypocrite, had a shaky faith, or was ignorant of their contributions to the Muslim nation.[73]

The hadīths in particular were carefully selected to point at specific issues raised at the time concerning the "Caliphate". The poem and the commentary put much emphasis on the abilities of `Abd al-Hamīd as a ruler of Muslims, and on his legitimacy based on *realpolitik* since he was of the Ottoman family, which had expanded and protected the Muslim Empire for centuries. Al-Nabhāni, by resorting to the *Sunna*, was delivering the message that, first, the claim was legitimate and second, those in opposition to the Sultan were deviating from Tradition. Although the Muslims might have an oppressive ruler, he argued, it did not mean they could fight, disobey or even abandon him. Al-Nabhāni 's message in this whole tract is obvious. He was addressing Muslims, who had to take the Prophetic Reports seriously and respect Islamic history, as portrayed by al-Nabhāni. Obviously non-Muslims and secular Muslims were not addressed. Thus, the message was for Muslim reformers, who by opposing the Muslim ruler were causing grave damage to

---

[72] Ibid: 22. The rule of the second Caliph `Umar ibn al-Khattab is considered one of the best periods of Islamic history.
[73] Ibid: 22-23.

Muslim unity, and thus weakening Islam.

Al-Afghāni, for example, who enthusiastically promoted pan-Islam, was quoted on several occasions displaying his mistrust and lack of confidence in the competence of `Abd al-Hamīd to lead the Muslims and claim the tilte of Caliph. 'Abduh, contrary to the political theory adopted by al-Nabhāni, believed that "if the ruler's actions are persistently contrary to the Law, Muslims must replace him as long as the public interest permits it."[74] Rashīd Rida accused the Turks as being a factor in the ultimate decline of Muslim societies and the establishment of the Caliphate itself,[75] and criticized `Abd al-Hamīd and his policies on the pages of *al-Manār*. Thus, conservative support for pan-Islam and the sultan was not only a religious conviction but also a political opportunity to respond to the reformers and resist their political-religious revisionism. This 'liberal' tendency, as will be discussed later, was perceived by al-Nabhāni, not only as damaging the legitimacy of the Sultan but also as destructive of Islam itself.

---

[74] Kerr. *Islamic Reform*: 149.
[75] Ibid: 174.

Chapter III

Western Education: All Evil

Introduction

`Abd al-Hamīd was fully aware of the fact that in order to promote stability in the Dynasty and succeed with his pan-Islam program, a unified Dynasty was necessary. This could be achieved by a "homogeneous" education, which put emphasis on obedience to Islam and the Muslim State. To undertake the process of "Islamization", `Abd al-Hamīd had to make some changes in the curriculum, which, as he thought, was not "Islamic" enough, since as a result of the *Tanzimāt*, less emphasis was put on "religious" education. Education in Islam, which was a monopoly of the religious elite and which was primarily religious, underwent "secularization", mainly under the impact of Western penetration into the Ottoman dynasty, and by the 1860's and 1870's, the personnel staffing the schools was more "secular" than "religious".

The Sultan started his educational reform in the public schools as early as 1879 urging that "if there are any deficiencies or gaps in the existing organization of public education they should be brought to an end."[1] For this purpose he tried to develop schools in all parts of the Dynasty. For lack of teachers and funds, the progress was very slow. He again approached the problem in 1883 by providing the Education Benefits Share to build new public schools, a project executed rapidly.[2] Efforts to strengthen the school

---

[1] Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*: 249.
[2] For more details on these schools and numbers of their graduates, see Ibid: 249-

system never stopped, and his interest in and the importance he gave to education, were considered equal to those of the *Hijāz* railway.[3]

In 1887, the curricula of the primary, secondary and higher schools were revised so as to include additional hours of religious instruction. The Ministry of Military Schools, the Imperial Civil Service School, School of Medicine and School of Engineering were to follow orders on "Islamization" of their curricula. The "enforcement" of religious instruction went as far as punishing students who had missed a prayer or a fast by imprisoning them in the schools on the days of leave. The aim of this policy was clear: "to take every opportunity to instill the sacredness of duty to the state" since "the survival of the Sublime State depends on the preservation of the Islamic faith."[4]

This "homogenous" education was to be applied even on Shi`i population in the Iraqi provinces when possible. This could have been achieved first by, stopping the spread of Shi`ism, second, "converting" Shi`is to Sunni Islam. The rival Safavid dynasty in Persia, the Shi`i neighbors of the Ottoman Dynasty, and Shi`i pockets within the Dynasty itself were threatening its stability by further spreading Shi`ism. Efforts to stop this spread under `Abd al-Hamīd started in 1892, when an order provided "for the payment of salaries to five teachers assigned to Iraq to stop the spread

---

250.

[3] On the importance of the Hijaz Railway to resist European control and promote pan-Islam, see Ochsenwald. *The Hijaz Railroad* and Landau. *The Hijaz Railway and the Muslim Pilgrimage.*

[4] Ibid: 96-97.

of Shi`ism."[5] Moreover, the Ottoman Porte had asked his ambassador to Tehran about possible measures that could be taken to stop the spread.[6] Some of the methods proposed were to restrain the Shi`i scholars from having easy access to Mecca and Medina, to reduce the number of religious teachers with a Shi`i background and to banish those who were propagating religious separatism.[7] On the other hand, Shi`i children were to be sent to Istanbul to study, with expenses paid by the Sultan. By "converting" them to Sunni Islam, they would also contribute to the preservation of religion and the State. However, efforts were directed towards conversion to Islam according to the *Hanafi* School of jurisprudence.[8] Another Shi`i sect to be a target of this education was the Nusayris in Northen Syria. They first attracted the attention of Istanbul in 1889, probably after Istanbul received reports on missionary activities among them.[9] Schools and mosques were built for them, and teachers and *imams* dispatched to teach them Sunni Islam. The interest in the Nusayris was not only motivated by "conversion" but also by `Abd al-Hamīd's interest in education in the Arab provinces in general. For example, more attention was given to Syria in the first decade of the century, when a school of medicine was opened in 1903 and another military school in 1904. Later, a school of law and another of Arts and

---

[5] Ibid: 347.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid: 347-348.
[8] The issue of Hanafi Islam will be discussed in chapter IV. For more information on targeting Shi`is for educational reform, see Selin Deringil. "The Struggle Against Shi'ism in Hamidien Iraq." *Die Welt Des Islams* 30(1990): 45-62.
[9] For more details on the "competition" on the Nusayris between missionaries and the Ottomans, see A. L. Tibawi. *American Interests in Syria.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

Sciences were established.[10]

The memos on the relation between education and "national" honor continued to be issued throughout the Hamīdien period. In 1901, a memorandum was circulated to the officials "to ensure that Ottoman officialdom understood the basis of its own rule."[11] The basis as set by Rashīd Pasha and repeated in the memorandum contained four pillars: Islam, the maintenance of the house of Osman, the protection of the *Haram al-Haramayn* (the two Holy Sanctuaries in Mecca and Medina) and the maintenance of Istanbul as the capital city. The circular then described at length "the sorry state of Islamic schools and *madrasas* compared to the much greater number and superior condition of Christian churches and schools."[12] An important reason why `Abd al-Hamīd was concerned about the *madrasa* (school) system was its effect on the quality of `Ulama because that was where they received their training. The importance of the `Ulama was clear to him since, according to the circular, without them Islam "would be wounded in its essence."[13]

Yet with the presence of different non-Muslim communities, and rival educational systems sponsored by missionaries, "Islamization" and devotion to the Sublime State became difficult tasks. `Abd al-Hamīd had always been

---

[10] A. L. Tibawi. *A Modern History of Syria including Lebanon and Palestine*. (Macmillan: St. Martin's Press, 1969): 194-6.
[11] Selim Deringil. "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23(1991): 346.
[12] Ibid: 347.
[13] Ibid.

suspicious of missionary activities. At one point he confessed the following to his grand vezir[14]:

> ... Although it is obviously desirable to take firm measures against them [missionaries], if open opposition is brought to play, the Sublime Porte will suffer the vexing interventions of the three powers' ambassadors. Thus the only way to fight against them is to increase the Islamic population and spread the belief in the Holiest of Faiths.[15]

Taking the *Tanzimāt* rescripts as their legal basis, the missionaries argued that since freedom was guaranteed to all Ottoman subjects, both Muslims and non-Muslims had the right to choose their religion. Thus, missionaries from different Christian sects made their way into the Dynasty by the mid-nineteenth century. These missionaries, usually attached to the embassies of the European Powers in Istanbul, were not warmly welcome by `Abd al-Hamīd. As a result, parallel to `Abd al-Hamīd's interest in education was his interest in curbing the efforts of the missionary schools.[16] During his reign, there was an abundance of orders to close down schools with no license. He even issued orders not to allow Muslim students to go to non-Muslim schools. A team of local *`Ulama* was charged to inform people about "the ills that will result from their children attending Christian schools."[17] In addition to the efforts made to prevent the circulation of missionary literature, there was reinforcement in 1880 of the 1869 law, which had made all curricula of non-Muslim schools subject to inspection.

---

[14] Grand Vezir would be equal to a Prime Minister.
[15] Deringil. *The Well-Protected Domains*: 114.
[16] This interest went as far as reporting on missionary activities in Hawaii. See Selim Deringil. "An Ottoman View of Missionary Activity in Hawaii." *Hawaiian Journal of History* (1993): 119-125.
[17] Deringil. *The Well-Protected Domains*: 117.

"They teach them to become enemies of the State and Religion": 'Blasphemous' Education

Al-Nabhāni, motivated by his alliance with the court, by his religious zeal against the danger of missionary schooling on Muslims and by his suspicion of "modern" education,[18] responded to the policy of `Abd al-Hamīd in publishing his treatise *Guiding the Lost by Warning Muslims from the Missionary Schools,* in April 1901.[19] The booklet had a preface, an introduction, forty sections and a conclusion. Many sections were repetitious but they still articulated al-Nabhāni' s vision of the danger of emerging modern schools and the solutions to prevent their danger and effect on Muslims. In the preface, he stated that one of the greatest catastrophes for the Muslim nation was the admission of some Muslim students to Christian schools.[20] By studying "worldly" sciences and foreign languages they learned Christianity and participated with the Christian boys in their religious activities. He wondered why they went to those schools although "there are hundreds and thousands of Muslim schools opened under his rule, the Present Caliph, his Majesty the Sultan `Abd al-Hamīd Khan II, may Allah

---

[18] This suspicion of and aggressive attitude towards modern education is similar to that of the Mennonites', and more specifically to that of the Old Order Amish' s: "The Amish, almost instinctively, sense the potential harm to their way of life in modern American schooling." See Marc A. Olshan. "Modernity, The Folk Society, and the Old Order Amish: an Alternative Interpretation." *Rural Sociology* 46(1981): 287.

[19] Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-Hayāra fi tahdhīr al-muslimīn min madāris al-nasāra.* (n. p, n. d)

[20] By the eve of World War I, there were in the Ottoman Dynasty 500 French Catholic schools, 675 American schools, and 178 British. The total number of students enrolled at the aforementioned schools, excluding German, Italian and Russian schools, was 106, 531 students. See, for instance, Roderic Davison. *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History 1774-1923: The Impact of The West.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990): 167-8.

strengthen Islam and the Muslims by him."[21] As his duty as the merciful father of all Muslims, the Sultan "was more concerned than the parents about the children' s education, which should be legal, and should guarantee the happiness of life and religion, and the safety of their beliefs."[22]

As usual, the introduction was where al-Nabhāni structured his religious argument and provided it with a historical support. He told his readers that sending Muslims to the missionary schools was worse than committing adultery during the day in front of the people." Yet he was surprised how these parents could still live within their communities since "not only did the believers despise them but also the unbelievers, for they saw them neglecting their religion". Again, like the previous poem, he argued about the importance of advice in Islam. After confirming the status of the Quran and the *Sunna* as anchor-points in the Muslim life he explained the religious duty behind his attempt to advise Muslims. He chose verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet, and ended them by a quotation from Ibn al-`Arabi[23] on why following his advice was a religious and moral responsibility. Then he explained the necessity and centrality of "prohibition of evil and promotion of good", a fundamental principle in the social order of Muslim societies. Al-Nabhāni concluded that if sinful Muslims were not advised by the other Muslims then all of them would face a bad fate.[24]

The introduction relied mainly on verses and *hadīths* that dealt with the issue of learning another religion. However, the following sections were

---

[21] Al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-hayāra:* 2.
[22] Ibid: 3
[23] Muhyi al-Dīn ibn al-`Arabi, a high authority for Sufis.

where al-Nabhāni grounded his arguments. He first explained that If al-Ghazāli[25] concluded in his *Revival of Religious Sciences* that poetry was harmful for young Muslim children, then parents, by sending their children to Christian schools, where they learn Christianity and go to church, were committing an even bigger mistake.[26]

By the time al-Nabhāni wrote the tract he had spent eleven years in Beirut, which was a center of international trade and more significantly, a center of European consulates-general and missionaries related to them.[27] Al-Nabhāni was fully aware of Beirut's importance to Europeans "who came to it and opened their schools for students from different religions."[28] According to him, they had forced the students to learn Christianity and practice it in the schools' church. Sending students to these schools under these conditions, he continued, would lead to apostasy because the students, by practicing Christianity, abandoned Islam.[29] The legal responsibility was critical since according to al-Nabhāni, students imitating Christians and learning from them would be seduced into apostasy and the solution, as he maintained, rested in the intervention of the Ottoman rule to oblige the Muslims to remove their children from these schools, and put them instead in the State-sponsored schools.[30] This would be "a service for both the religion, the

---

[24] Al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-hayāra:* 9-12.
[25] Abu Hāmed al-Ghazāli (d. 1111), a highly respected and reputable medieval scholar.
[26] Al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-hayāra:* 12-13.
[27] See Layla T. Fawaz. *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[28] Al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-hayāra:*15.
[29] Ibid.
[30] For more details on the official pressure on missionary schools to close down , see Roderic H. Davison. *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History 1774-1923: The Impact*

Dynasty and their protector, our master, the Commander of the Believers, may Allah render him victorious."[31]

A "Muslim" rule cannot survive without conscious "Muslim" subjects. Religious awareness as well as practice, for al-Nabhāni, could hold the state together, and any attempt to deviate from religious commitments would reflect badly on the relation of the subjects to their Dynasty. Thus, al-Nabhāni' s opposition to missionary education was not only in the religious domain but also in the civic one. Analyzing the intentions of the countries sponsoring these schools, he anticipated their danger to the Ottoman Dynasty. The reason, he argued, why missionaries were spending so much money on the education of the Muslims was to make them abandon their religion. By making Muslims read their languages, biographies and stories, attacking Islam and famous Muslim scholars, "the country tutoring him would become more important than his [the Muslim's] own country, and its nationality better than his."[32] These educated people, he continued, would appear as if they belonged to Islam but in reality they would be against their country and their religion. They would criticize both Islam and the Muslim Dynasty, and praise the country to which the school belonged.[33] To support his argument, al-Nabhāni used a common quotation from a Christian source implying that the schools' aim was to unite the Christians to defeat the Muslims. Since the use of force against Islam would ultimately strengthen it, causing the Muslim youngster to doubt his or her religion was even more

---

of the West. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990): 168.
[31] Al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-hayāra*: 16.
[32] Ibid: 17.

effective since they would be neither Christians nor Muslims.[34] He followed it by another quotation on the aim of the schools for Muslim girls, which was "to make women control men and then make the latter abandon their religion.[35]

While al-Nabhāni was warning against the school he was as well aware of the reason behind their popularity, which among others, included the languages they taught. Although he knew there was high demand for foreign language training among Muslim Ottomans, he did not perceive language study as necessary and desirable since it might lead to the perdition of Muslim children. His advice was to remove children from these schools, although they would have better opportunities for studying foreign languages, and, instead, register them in the Islamic schools, which "hold the responsibility of teaching them what they need from the world and from religion, guaranteeing the safety of their beliefs."[36] It was a well-known fact for the Ottomans and their dignitaries that the public schools sponsored by the Dynasty were not able to offer a quality education equal to that of the missionary schools, especially in the domain of languages[37], yet for al-Nabhāni, it was not worth risking Muslim beliefs for the sake of learning foreign languages. No compromise in the religious training of Muslim children was worth the training offered at missionary schools. He was worried about the possible conversion of children, or at least their doubt in Islam and the

---

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid: 18-19.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid: 20.
[37] Deringil. *The well-Protected Domains*: 118-19.

Qur'an, which would ultimately lead them to infidelity.[38] Although al-Nabhāni was not at all well read in Western sources and had never visited a Western country, he anticipated that doubt in Islam might become similar to doubt in Christianity, resulting in distrust of all religions, a phenomenon, he said, widespread among many Europeans.[39] The process that gradually made the students doubt religions was, he claimed, the learning of "natural sciences", the mixing with unbeliever teachers and students at schools, and the reading of books that questioned religion. These children "would live in hypocrisy among Muslims and would teach their children what they believed in."[40] Thus, public schools with their curricula should be satisfactory to Muslims since they provided students with adequate teaching in addition to maintaining Islamic behavior.[41]

He conclusively drew a line between two separate educational systems, which in his view were not complementary. He preferred someone who knew no foreign languages but at the same time was 'immortal' in the heavens to an expert in foreign languages but who was an infidel who would go to 'hellfire'.[42] Al-Nabhāni considered modern sciences an evil that would take Muslims away from their religion and traditions. The argument that smart children would maintain the balance between modern education and religion was invalid as well, he argued, because the envisioned danger was greater than it appeared. "There was no benefit for the children if compared

---

[38] Al-Nabhāni. *Irshād al-hayāra*: 20-21.
[39] Ibid: 21.
[40] Ibid: 22.
[41] Ibid: 25.
[42] Ibid: 25-26.

to the loss of religion, honor, solicitude for their nation, and Dynasty."[43] The price of learning foreign languages and sciences, he argued, was a generation that would become the enemy of Muslims and their history, and a friend of those enemies whom they preferred to their own country and people.[44] If modern education promoted its initiates socially and economically, then the instructors should be rich, which, in his conclusion, was not the case. On the other hand, there were rich Muslims who had no knowledge of any foreign language. The best argument for him was to have faith that God provided people with what they needed regardless of their job and position, but "had Muslims believed in this they would have been enlightened and comforted".[45] All those who would still send their children to schools had chosen to be infidels along with their children, and their grandchildren.[46] Even "secular" schools that did not teach about Christianity were unacceptable for him because the students, at best, abandoned prayers and Islamic practices.

Other sections of the treatise were interesting in exposing al-Nabhāni's defiance of the sense of "superiority" the Christians had started to display. He represented a general antagonistic Muslim attitude towards the freedom that Christians started to enjoy in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile he was worried that they might use these causes of superiority manifested in

> the big number of Christians, the strength of their countries, their spread in the whole world, their knowledge in worldly sciences, their

---

[43] Ibid: 26-27.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid: 27-28.
[46] Ibid: 27-29.

> advancement in unusual manufactures and strange discoveries, and their occupation of many countries,[47]

to argue that had the Muslims been guided by a true religion they would not have been in such deteriorated situation while Christians had discovered and colonized other countries. However, for al-Nabhāni, these could not necessarily be considered signs of a good religion.[48] Even the argument that Muslims could benefit from these schools by learning the tools by which Christians were able to conquer them failed to impress him. This could happen only if Muslim students had been raised and educated in Muslim schools.[49] As a result of his sense of Christian "superiority" and Muslim "weakness", he warned that Christians did not send their children to Muslim schools even if they were successful ones, not even to the Christian schools of other sects. While Christians were concerned about their religion and protecting it, Muslims were not.[50] Another kind of damage Muslims were causing to their religion by sending students to these schools was to promote Christianity by making its cause look strong and the numbers of Christians bigger.[51] In the worst case, Muslims who lived under Christian rule and had no choice but to send their children to these schools should migrate to

---

[47]Ibid: 33.
[48]Ibid: 33-34. This argument was further elaborated in another tract published in 1906, entitled *Tanbīh al-afkār ila hikmat iqbāl al-dunya `ala al-kuffār*. (n. p., 1906). Al-Nabhāni tried to explain why Muslims did not possess the wealth and the power that Christians were enjoying. The reason, as he stated, was that Muslims would enjoy them in the heaven in the afterlife but Christians would not. Thus, God's justice dictated that non-Muslims would enjoy life, since according to al-Nabhāni's argument, their fate was hellfire.
[49] Ibid: 42-43.
[50] Ibid: 36.
[51] Ibid: 38-39.

Muslim countries where they could secure an Islamic education.[52] As to those who did not refrain from registering their children in Christian schools because they did not want to be accused of being religious fanatics, they should not be ashamed of this accusation.[53]

The ultimate solution for al-Nabhāni was to remove Muslim students from these schools, if not by their parents then by the intervention of the rulers themselves.[54] Money should also be provided so that poverty and need would not drive children to the missionary schools.[55] Genuine Muslims would listen to what he was saying and would take the potential danger into consideration. As for those who did not care about their religion, the ones in authority (the rulers) should prohibit them from sending their children to Christian schools. This measure "should be taken as an act of piety and care for their religion."[56] He concluded this section with a comparison between the two religions (Christianity and Islam), showing the dogmatic corruption of Christianity,[57] followed by another section, warning Muslims against Shi`i publications and teachings in schools.

Al-Nabhāni's response to the activities of missionary schools was not only a reaction to the degeneration of the *madrasas* and the role of its tutors who

> while they were the privileged and powerful estate in Muslim society, comprised the majority of the educated Muslim population of the

---

[52] Ibid: 41.
[53] Ibid: 43.
[54] Ibid: 44.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid: 45
[57] Selim Deringil. "Legitimacy Structures": 348.

> Ottoman Empire. They staffed the mosques, mektebs (elementary schools), and medreses, were responsible for educating the Muslim community, served as the judges in the courts of Holy Law (Sheriat), and administered as well the Kanuns (edicts) of the Sultans,[58]

was not only another dimension of assisting the Sultan in his efforts to resist European interference and dominance in the area, but also a reaction to the spread of "sciences" and support for them outside the domain of religion. He believed the ultimate aim of "modern sciences" was to damage Islam and corrupt Muslims. Modern sciences for him, upheld evil as they came from an "infidel source", and were being used to control the Muslim world. They were nothing but a trick to distract Muslims from their religion and divide them. Consequently, the modern education offered by these schools was nothing more than "Christian Europe" as disguised out, to destroy Islam. However, al-Nabhāni' s predictions about the consequences of modern education were not inaccurate. As one observer stated, the introduction of different schools in the Ottoman Dynasty had had an enormous effect on its future generations. The different schools

> produced several educated classes, parallel to one another yet hostile, unable to understand or appreciate each other, preventing the kind of national unity and cohesiveness needed to hold the empire together.[59]

---

[58] Nikki R. Keddie (ed.) *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*: 33.

[59] Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire*: 250. This ultimately led to several civil wars in the area and shaped its twentieth century history. See, for example, Kamal Salibi. "The 1860 Upheaval in Damascus as seen by al-Sayyid Muhammad Abu'l Su`ūd al-Hāsibi: Notable and Later *Naqīb al-Ashrāf* of the City," *Beginnings of Modernization*: 185-202; Philip Khoury. *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism,* and Bruce Masters. "The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An Aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the Capitalist World System," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22(1990): 3-20. Al-Nabhāni' s antagonistic position on Christians and Jews (to a less extent) was revealed in his two comparative treatises. See Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Al-Qasīda al-ra'iyya al-kubra fi al-kamalāt al-ilāhiyya wa al-sīra al-nabawiyya wa wasf al-milla al-islāmiyya wa al-milal al-ukhra;* and *Sa`ādat al-dārayn fi ittibā` dīn al-islam wa tawdīh al-farq baynahu wa bayna dīn al-nasāra fi al-`aqā'id wa al-ahkām.* (n. p,

However, not all concerned Muslims were equally alert to Western education and missionary schools. While the fear of the "political" role of the schools was common, this conservative perception of modern sciences was not. Muslim reformers agreed that the schools were suspicious in terms of their missionary activities and the potential danger they posed to the beliefs of Muslim children, but they nevertheless believed in the necessity of the modern sciences and made their learning and development a goal that Muslims should reach.[60] `Abduh, for example, was an enthusiast of sciences to the degree of trying to find them a place in al-Azhar's curriculum.[61] He believed that if science and religion were to come together, they could "bring society to fulfillment". Yet, he warned against imitating European sciences without understanding them in their own context, or otherwise, they "would be alien transplants without roots, destined to wither in Muslim soil."[62] Modernizers, otherwise, would be imitators, similar to those who follow *Taqlīd* in the Islamic context. European sciences must be filtered and integrated into Muslim societies, where religion should be the core of everything. `Abduh saw no difference between religion and sciences and considered any "apparent" contradictions superficial and alien to the spirit of Islam, which, he maintained, gave much room for reason. Rashīd Rida also understood European sciences as something from which Muslims could

---

1908/1326).

[60] The pioneer on the necessity of learning modern sciences was Muhammad `Abduh. See John W. Livingston. "Muhammad `Abduh on Science." *The Muslim World* 85(October, 1995): 215-234.

[61] See chapter V.

benefit. For him, science, technical skill, and democracy provided Europe with a commanding position. The Muslims, in their turn, should acquire these while preserving their moral values. Most importantly, he believed that the development of science was the main reason behind the spread of education in Europe, and consequently behind its achievement of progress. He expressed the following in *al-Manār:*

> Europe is able to attack us with the strength of its nations, sciences, industries, organization, wealth... If we remain in this state of ignorance, we will never stand before Europe.[63]

In 1899, Rida had already asserted that for Islamic reform to take place in the East, "traditional" scholars had first to be convinced of the indispensability of natural sciences, which result in the possession of wealth and power.[64]

Apparently, what the reformers advocated, al-Nabhāni categorically denied and refused. For al-Nabhāni, modern sciences were alien to Islam, and more or less capable of destroying it. Islam and modern sciences had to be kept apart, and attempts to reconcile them would result in the submission of religion to "secularism". The notion of selecting or infiltrating the sciences to develop them in an Islamic context seemed impossible to him. Since modern sciences were to be taught and learned in European languages, and since there was a relation between language and "national" affiliation, Muslims should avoid sciences altogether. According to him, languages could

---

[62] Livingston: 223.
[63] *Al-Manār*. 8(1905): 759.
[64] Ibid: 2(1899): 70. He repeated his condemnation of these scholars for not supporting modern sciences throughout his career. See for example, Ibid: 8(1905): 117 and 789.

not be studied and developed for the sake of Islam because languages represented their nationalities. If Muslims learned French, this meant they would become more "French" than being Arab or Muslim. Moreover, modern sciences did not necessarily produce progress since progress, as he believed, was not related to human contribution but to a divine grace. His position on modern education and modern sciences reflected his whole attitude to how he conceived modernity and what was "modern".[65] And, this became even clearer when al-Nabhāni attempted to argue against the religious hermeneutics of the reformers in their approaches to modernity and Islam, and more specifically against *Ijtihād*.

[65] Al-Nabhāni' s concern about modernity and modernization was also reflected in his tract on photography published in 1906 and entitled *Kitāb al-tahdhīr min ittikhādh al-suwar wa al-taswīr*. (*The Book of Warning against Photos and Photography*). Al-Nabhāni condemned the teaching of both photography and drawing at schools and the use of pictures of animals and persons, arguing that picturing an animal or a person was forbidden in Islam. Rida, however, argued that accepting or rejecting photography and drawing depended on the purpose of the picture. Although Muslim scholars had treated the issue of "pictures" as early as the Prophet's time, interest in it was renewed at the turn of the century with the introduction of solar photography. While Rida, for example, argued that this then new kind of photography could be useful in many fields, al-Nabhani refused to discuss any of its advantages. See Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Al-tahdhīr min ittikhādh al-suwar wa al-taswīr*: 7-14 and *Al-Manār*. 14(1911): 671-673. Another mouthpiece for the conservatives and their attitude towards modernization, although published in a later period, was *al-haqā'iq*. *Al-haqā'iq*, the conservative journal published in Damascus in August 1910, fiercely reacted against the use of telegraphy and theatrical performance. See Commins. *Islamic Reform*: 121-122.

Chapter IV

Ijtihād: Between Religious Dogmatism and Political Pragmatism

Introduction

While promoting the policy of the Sultan, the conservatives were intensifying their assault on reformers by taking advantage of the privileges then enjoyed from the Ottoman ruler. For example, though censorship was a major characteristic of the late Ottoman period[1], the conservatives, and especially conservative Sufis, seemed to have escaped it successfully, due of course to their influence in Istanbul.[2] Al-Nabhāni took the opportunity to wage war on the reformers' call to re-open the gate of *Ijtihād*. This issue was the most controversial topic between reformist and conservative scholars and became a focal point in the debate over necessary reforms. The importance of *Ijtihād* lay in the threat it imposed to the conservatives' religious survival and in the political implications of its revival. Thus, the debate over *Ijtihād* was not untouched by the political atmosphere in the Ottoman Empire. While each group established its own hermeneutics on the definition and history of *Ijtihād*, it still needed an academic definition, independent of religious beliefs and biases.

---

[1] For more information, see for instance, Caesar Farah. "Censorship and Freedom of Expression in Ottoman Syria and Egypt," and Louis Bazin. "Censure Ottomane et Lexicographie: LE KAMUS-Ï FRANSEVÎ DE SÂMÎ BEY" in *Économie et Sociétés*: 202-206.

[2] Biographical dictionaries of the period reflect the nature of the books that were given permission to be printed. No doubt, religious topics, mainly on Sufism, were heading the list. See, for example, B. Abu Manneh. "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadi": 147-148.

Ijtihād is a juristic methodology by which expert Muslim scholars exert maximum mental energy to search for a legal opinion.[3] The method was established as a religious duty to discover the *Shari`a* and apply it. It is carried out by "a coherent system of principles through which a qualified jurist could extract rulings for novel cases. From the third/ninth century onwards this was universally recognized by jurists to be the sacred purpose of *usūl al-fiqh* [legal theory]."[4] The prerequisites for the ability to practice it are knowledge of the Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet, the principles of inference and analogy (*istidlāl* and *qiyās*) and of the Arabic language.[5] That a Mujtahid (the scholar who exercises *Ijtihād*) who commits an error is not considered to have sinned but rather is entitled to one award (rather than a double reward for a Mujtahid with sound *Ijtihad*) further encouraged its practice. *Ijtihād* remained a prerequisite in the process of legal development, and those who rejected it, until the tenth century, were ultimately excluded from "orthodox" Sunnism. Among the groups who rejected it was the Hashwiyya. The Hashwis were Traditionalists, people of Hadith, primarily concerned with the study of transmitted sources, "that possessed an incomplete legal doctrine."[6] Meanwhile, four schools of jurisprudence had been established and completed by *Ijtihād*. These were considered the official schools, and others were eliminated. While there was an *Ijmā`* (consensus) on the validity of the existing legal schools there was an *Ijmā`* as well on the

---

[3] This is the definition in a legal context. For various definitions, see Fareed. *Legal Reform in the Muslim World*: 19-21.
[4] Hallaq. "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?": 5
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid: 9

illegality of establishing new schools. From the eleventh century onwards, jurists followed one or more of these established schools and never tried to establish new ones. Therefore, *Ijtihād* was only applicable within the schools themselves. At the same time there was a significant legal development which may be of relevance to our discussion. Prominent scholars in the field of political theory such as al-Baghdādi (d. 1037) and al-Māwardi (d. 1058) considered the ability to practice *Ijtihād* a qualification for a Muslim ruler to be able to efficiently and properly rule and complete his duties as well as a qualification for his delegates.[7] Juwayni (d. 1085) then suggested that in case the ruler cannot practice it "the jurists are to be followed and the sultan will provide them with help, power and protection."[8] Al-Ghazāli (d. 1111) was more realistic when he declared that *Ijtihād* was not necessarily to be fulfilled by the ruler. There was no difference whether he, or his jurists, reached the level of practicing *Ijtihād*.[9]

So far, there was no discussion on closing the gate of *Ijtihād*, a discussion that was to be initiated in the twelfth century under Seljuk rule. The Hanbalis and Shafi`is insisted that a *Mujtahid* should exist at all times to look after the needs of the Muslims and solve their arising problems. Those who disagreed insisted that there might come a day when *Mujtahids* would not exist anymore because real knowledge would disappear. The source for this belief was the following *hadīth*:

> Allah will not take knowledge away by removing it from people. He will rather take it away by seizing the scholars. Then, when there is no

---

[7] Ibid: 12-13.
[8] Ibid: 13.
[9] Ibid: 14-15.

> [true] scholar left, people will take ignorant leaders and there will give *fatwas* without knowledge. Thus they err and lead people astray.[10]

Al-Nawawi (d.1277), the Shafi`i jurist, compromised by making a distinction between two categories of *Ijtihad*: independent absolute *Ijtihād* (*Ijtihād mutlaq mustaqill*) and affiliated absolute *Ijtihād* (*Ijtihād mutlaq muntasib*). *Mujtahids* in the first category had complete freedom to derive laws from the primary sources, while those in the second category would adhere to the principles of the established schools and elaborate on legal matters accordingly.

> This, however, cannot be regarded as taqlid, since the affiliated *mudjtahid* accepts his imam' s ruling with complete understanding of its bases and arguments... Thus this theory recognized the possibility that there were still absolute *mudjtahids*, without however compromising the superiority of the founders of the *madhhabs*.[11]

These arguments and counter arguments did not exceed polemics. There was not yet any consensus that *Mujtahids* were already extinct. Under these circumstances, the doctrine of *Taqlid* (accepting an opinion concerning a legal rule without knowledge of its bases)[12] started to grow significantly, especially among the ranks of the Hanafis, Malikis and the Shafi`is (albeit to a lesser extent).[13] At the same time, Sufism was on the rise and becoming popular. The structure of the Sufi Orders, based on the Master and his Peers, further enhanced the position of legal imitation among scholars. By the eleventh century, *Ijtihād* was classified into levels (*Marātib* or *Tabaqāt)*. This

---

[10] Peters. "Idjtihād nad Taqlīd in 18th and 19th Century Islam": 136.
[11] Ibid: 137.
[12] Ibid: 135.
[13] Hallaq. "Was the Gate of Ijtihād Closed": 28.

classification underwent several changes but the levels were finally categorized as follows:

1- Absolute or independent *Ijtihad* (*Mutlaq* or *Mustaqill*)

2- Associated *Ijtihād* (*Muntasib*)

3- Verified *Ijtihād* (*Murajjih*)

4- Restricted *Ijtihād* (*Muhāfiz*)

5- Transmitted or imitated *Ijtihad* (*Muqallid*)[14]

However, the Hanafis were convinced that *Mujtahids* had become extinct and there followed a consensus that *Mujtahids* did not exist anymore. This, according to modern scholarship, did not mean that the practice of *Ijtihad* was not available anymore, but people were referring to it with other terms.[15] One example was drawn from the legal questions regarding various social and economic aspects of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Ottoman life.[16]

***Ijtihād* and Reform**

Although *Ijtihād* had been for centuries a prominent tool in legal matters and its abandonment was considered an unorthodox practice, by the nineteenth century, it became for many conservatives illegitimate and totally alienated from the corpus of legal theories. In the late eighteenth century, and more significantly in the nineteenth century, there was a massive attempt on the part of scholars and even bureaucrats to re-use the term *Ijtihād,* and more

---

[14] Fareed. *Legal Reform*: 47-48.
[15] For more details see Hallaq. "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?"
[16] Legal issues that were raised during these two centuries were the *Waqf* of cash, drugs, tobacco, coffee, music... For more details see Hallaq. "Was the Gate of Ijtihad

importantly, to exercise it. They denied the closure of the gate of *Ijtihād* and attacked not only the prominence of *Taqlīd* but also the principle of *Taqlīd* itself. The campaign against *Taqlīd* in favor of *Ijtihād* was accompanied by a vicious attack on Sufi practices such as saints' intercession and tombs' visit, believed not to belong to Orthodox Islam. Among the reformers, the bitter enemies of al-Nabhāni, were, with Ibn Taymiyya first on the list, Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni, Muhammad `Abduh, Rashīd Rida, Mahmūd Shukri al-Alūsi of Iraq and Hasan Khān of India. Ibn Taymiyya, in response to the polemics of the century on *Ijtihād,* insisted on its exercise and was himself a *Mujtahid* although he did not claim the highest level (there is no doubt that he highly qualified for it but he never claimed it). He believed that "the signs of the age were now calling not so much for original systems of law, but for the scripture and Tradition to throw their light on the existing *fiqh*."[17] He is set in the second level of *Ijtihād* which is "associated" or "affiliated" since he maintained his adherence to the Hanbali school. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya attacked *Taqlīd*. His argument was that "the qualified jurist should never be satisfied with anything less than all arguments and full evidences for any jurisprudential position."[18] Another issue that Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned was *Talfīq*, the inter-school interpretation. He asserted, with some restrictions, that "a creative interpreter is not bound by an opinion of his own school if he

---

Closed?": 31.
[17] Victor E. Makari. *Ibn Taymiyya's Ethics: The Social Factor*. (California: Scholars Press, 1983): 88.
[18] Ibid: 90.

discovers the validity of another."[19] Reforms in legal theory were accompanied by reforms in popular Sufism, an issue that was to make of Ibn Taymiyya the primary enemy of the Sufis.[20]

After Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and ibn `Abd al-Hādi, who adopted his views on both *Ijtihād* and Sufism, the Muslim world witnessed the influence of the Wahhabi movement. Although the movement was defeated militarily by Muhammad Ali Pasha, it put down roots in the Muslim world, and was characterized by its antagonism to the Ottoman authorities. The Wahhabis, also known as the *Muwahhidun*, believed that "God commanded people to obey him alone and to follow the teachings of the Prophet."[21] Although they adhere to the Hanbali school they reject all interpretations by any of the schools if they do not see them as being in accordance with the two primary sources. This freedom for re-interpretation gave them room for *Ijtihād*, the doors of which, according to them, had never been closed. In Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab' s "Six Great Beneficial Principles"[22], the sixth principle was

> rejecting the practice, established by Satan, with regard to abandoning the Koran and the Sunnah and following various divergent opinions and tendencies. This, i.e. the practice established by Satan, is based [on the opinion] that the Koran and the Sunnah can only be known by absolute *mudjtahid* and that an absolute *mudjtahid* is a person with so many qualifications that they are maybe not even to be found completely in Abu Bakr and `Umar. If someone is not like this, he must [according to this opinion] keep away from them [i. e. Koran and Sunnah], as [if bound by] a positive and unequivocal obligation,

---

[19] Ibid: 91.
[20] For more details, see Th. E. Homerin. "Ibn Taymiya's *al-Sufiyah wa-al Fuqara'*," *Arabica* 32(July, 1985): 219-244.
[21] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Muslim World*. Vol. 4: 308.
[22] "*Sittat usūl `adhīma mufida jalīla*. This is a chapter in Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. *Majmū`at al-tawhīd al-Najdiyya*. (Cairo, Matba`at al-Manar, 1345 [1926]): 140.

> and if he [nevertheless] seeks guidance in them, he is either a heretic or a fool because of their difficulty.[23]

The same beliefs on *Ijtihād* were later embraced by al-Afghāni and his disciples. They supported its exercise and attributed to *Taqlīd* the backwardness of Muslim societies. For al-Afghāni, Islam was not only a mobilizing political factor against imperialism but also a pragmatic system able to assimilate new developments. In his *Refutation of the Materialists*, he considered Islam to be the only religion pioneering the use of reason by addressing itself to man's reason. Religion is accepted through argument not supposition.[24] As Hourani indicated, this statement had far-reaching implications. This meant that

> Since reason can interpret, all men can interpret, provided they have a sufficient knowledge of Arabic, are of sound mind, and know the traditions of the *Salaf*, the first generations of faithful guardians of Prophet's message. The door of Ijtihad is not closed, and it is a duty as well as a right for men to apply the principles of the Quran anew to the problems of their time. To refuse to do this is to be guilty of stagnation (*jumud*) or imitation (*taqlid*), and these are the enemies of true Islam just as materialism is an enemy.[25]

Therefore, *Ijtihād* for al-Afghāni was "not just an element of the law, but rather, an effective tool for broadening the intellectual legacy of Islam."[26] The emphasis on the role of *Ijtihād* and reason was later developed and even sharpened by Muhammad `Abduh. Influenced by the *Mu`tazila*,[27]

---

[23] Peters. "Idjtihād and Taqlīd": 134.
[24] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni. *Al-radd `ala al-dahriyyīn*. (Cairo: al-Salām al-`Alamiyya, 1983): 102-103.
[25] Hourani. *Arabic Thought*: 127.
[26] Fareed. *Legal Reform*: 58.
[27] The Mu`tazila was a medieval school, which defended the role of reason in interpreting Islam and its laws. It was later declared a heresy and was oposed by two schools: the Maturidiyya and the Ash'ariyya, which al-Nabhani defended in his writings. Modern scholarship has considered 'Abduh' s thought a revival of the

Muhammad 'Abduh gave a sound human reason a role in making distinctions, and denied any conflict between reason and revelation, which, as he argued, were rather harmonious.[28] In addition to his call to re-establish *Ijtihād,* `Abduh led a fierce attack on the Sufis and their practices, accusing them of causing the weakness of Muslims, and of manipulating religion to control the masses. Rashīd Rida held the same views and succeeded in disseminating them by making *al-Manār* a pulpit to promote *Ijtihād* and condemn *Taqlīd* and its supporters. For Rida, it was true that Islam was a perfect religion and that the Quran and the Sunna were the cornerstone of Islamic legislation. However, these infallible regulations were with regard to worship that did not change with time, and not to worldly matters. Worldly matters were subject to change and man was responsible to respond to them because "God laid down only those broad and general principles according to which these matters should be treated."[29] This responsibility would be translated by going to the roots of Islam, i. e. the Quran and the Tradition of the Prophet, understand them and interpret them in accordance with the century. Acquiring knowledge of these sources was a duty for every Muslim who "wants to save Muslims from ignorance and innovations and take them to the origin of their religion."[30] In response to the supporters of *Taqlīd*, he argued that the earlier scholars had a consensus that *Taqlīd* was forbidden.

Mu`tazila school. For more information, see Richard C. Martin et al. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol.* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).

[28] See, for instance, in addition to Muhammad Abduh's *The Theology of Unity.* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1966), John W. Livingston. "Muhammad `Abduh on Science": 215-234.

[29] Fareed. *Legal Reform*: 216.

[30] *Al-Manār.* 8(1905): 818.

Later scholars allowed *Taqlīd* on the grounds that Muslims did not have enough knowledge to practice *Ijtihād*, on the condition that a *Muqallid* does not follow another *Muqallid*. However, Rida continued, the latest scholars were following *Muqallids* rather than *Mujtahids*.[31] He concluded that the four *Imāms* after whom the schools of legal interpretation were named explained the Quran and the Sunna to facilitate their understanding and not to make them the religion itself.[32] Rida, however, made it clear that people who do not have the ability to understand the Quran and the Sunna should ask and not practice *Ijtihād* by themselves.[33]

Ijtihād and Conservatism

The literature on the debate over *Ijtihād* and *Taqlīd* was abundant in the period. It rebounded between Wahhabis and religious reformers on one hand, and conservative Sufis on the other hand, and became part of both the religious and political intellectual discourse. The 'Ulama and other thinkers supporting *Ijtihād* were critical of the political establishment and were subject to persecution by Ottoman authorities[34] while those favoring *Taqlīd* were attached to the regime and defended it. Al-Nabhāni , in response to the criticism of the Sufis and advancement of the theory of *Ijtihād*, took an active role in refuting the claims of the reformers. His efforts in the dispute were

---

[31] Ibid. 8(1905): 820.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid. 8(1905): 860.

[34] The *Mujtahid* incident in Damascus shows us that without being "political" enemies, people suspicious of favoring Ijtihad were persecuted. See Commins. *Islamic Reform*: 50-55.

twofold: condemning the revival of *Ijtihād* on one hand and supporting the long-established Sufi practices on the other.

Al-Nabhāni' s opinion on the debate was first revealed in his book entitled *God's Proof on the Prophet's Miracles*,[35] published in 1898. This book was the first attempt of al-Nabhāni to explain in a less sophisticated manner the hermeneutics of legal development and the role of *Ijtihād* in it, as understood by him and his conservative camp. Among the proofs of the Prophet Muhammad, as he argued, was

> the guardians of religion [the scholars] whom God sent to exercise *Ijtihād* and elaborate on the details of the Shari`a. These *Mujtahids* are one step higher than the *Huffāz*, the ones who protected and kept the sayings of the Prophet.[36]

In addition to their knowledge of religious sciences, they elaborated on them, through *Ijtihād*, and thus "became the leaders of the Muslims and their ideals."[37] Although there were many of these *Mujtahids* in the early period of Islam, the Muslim nation decided to adopt and follow four of them: Abu Hanīfa, Mālek, al-Shāfi`i and Ibn Hanbal. Here al-Nabhāni cited several prerequisites that enabled them to practice *Ijtihād*: the ability to follow both text-based and interpretation-based discourses,[38] consciousness and mental sharpness, in addition to piety and a divine light thrown in their hearts.[39] The schools of jurisprudence functioned as protectors of Islam, "not allowing it to be invaded by what does not belong to it... as happened to the previous

---

[35] Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Hujjat Allah `ala al-`ālamīn fi mu`jizāt sayyid al-mursalīn.*
[36] Al-Nabhāni. *Hujjat Allah*: 770.
[37] Ibid: 770-71.
[38] The literal translation from Arabic would be textual and interpretive sciences. The above translation is a more accurate tendency of the exact meaning.
[39] Ibid: 771.

religions and their Books."[40] This was the introduction to his arguments on *Ijtihād*. At the end of this section, he introduced the following statement:

> And know that *Ijtihād* does not exist anymore and that the gate of *Ijtihād* was closed hundreds of years ago with the agreement of the scholars of the [four] schools, who are trusted, the masters of the nation and the defenders of its religion.[41]

Al-Nabhāni, like many other scholars, believed in a declining role of religion in the life of Muslims. Thus, he maintained that Muslims were not allowed to claim *Ijtihād* anymore because they were unable to understand the Qur'an and the Sunna by themselves. They would rather follow one of the four schools and imitate one of the Imams and his immediate followers. No one could claim *Ijtihād* "unless he is insane in his mind and religion."[42] To demonstrate the difficulty and responsibility of its exercise he gave the example of the famous scholar al-Suyuti (1445-1505), who claimed the lowest degree of *Ijtihād* (which is giving *fatwa*) but, as al-Nabhāni declared, was unable to actually practice it.[43] He then guided the readers to many books that agreed on closing the gate of *Ijtihād*, not only absolute *Ijtihād* but also within the schools themselves.[44]

Although following one of the schools was permitted, choosing more than one was not. Al-Nabhāni denied his readers the right of *Talfīq*, the inter-school interpretation, allowing the Muslims to choose judgements from

---

[40] Ibid: 773.
[41] Ibid: 773.
[42] Ibid: 774.
[43] Ibid. In fact, al-Suyuti was able to practice *Ijtihād* but his contemporaries denied him not the right of *Ijtihād* but rather his claim to be superior to them. See, for instance, Hallaq. "Was the Gate of Ijtihād Closed?": 27.
[44] Al-Nabhāni. *Hujjat Allah*: 775.

among the four schools.[45] He then warned the reader not to listen to those who were asking for the practice of absolute *Ijtihād*, and not to trust their ability to infer religious laws since "they lacked both reasoning and religion."[46] His advice was to read 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha`rāni's[47] books on the role and importance of the *Mujtahidīn*,[48] and used a quotation from his book. The quotation did not deal with forbidding *Ijtihād;* but rather it praised the efforts of the *Mujtahidīn*. He also recommended reading the *Hadīth*, but for the sake of knowledge only and not to derive judgements and laws.[49] In all cases, he continued, deriving laws, as the work of earlier scholars had indicated, did not rely on "opinion": "it was purely based on the texts of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*."[50]

His second treatise, *Pertinent Arrows on People Falsely Claiming Ijtihād*, appeared as an addendum to his famous book *The Testimonies of Truth* but seemed to be an independent treatise, written former. He introduced it by stating the purpose of the book:

> In this century when knowledge has become scarce and humiliated, and ignorance has become widespread and honored, a stupid group searching for knowledge has been manipulated by Satan. This group made them stand for absolute *Ijtihād* until they had claimed that they were like Shafi`i, Malek, Ahmad and Nu`man [Abu Hanifa]... They claim it although they are weak students, considered from among the common people and not among the scholars of Islam. Great harm

---

[45] Ibid: 776. See below the political implication of his statement.
[46] Ibid: 775.
[47] Althoug al-Nabhāni advised his readers to read al-Sha`rani' s books, the Egyptian Sufi was an advocate of Ijtihâd and *Talfiq*. He seemed to have even claimed independent *Ijtihād*. His theory was that "a genuine Sufi can all the precepts of religion directly from the Source of the Sharī`a." See Winter. *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*: 238. As to the founders of the Schools, he considered them "Sufi saints [who] had direct access to the Source of religion, besides which, they met the Prophet in spirit." Ibid: 239.
[48] Al-Nabhāni. *Hujjat Allah*:777.
[49] Ibid: 776.
[50] Ibid: 779.

> occurred to them and to some ignorant Muslims as a result of this sick call and other [bad] characteristics in them. I thus wrote this strong and straightforward treatise to warn people about their false calls and bad habits, as advice for them and for Muslims, and as a service to this religion."[51]

He first copied the same chapter on *Ijtihād* from the aforementioned book *Hujjat Allah* and then proceeded to the description of the

> "ignorant students...manipulated by Satan... They say that they understand the Quran and the Sunna, and derive laws independently without the need to imitate one of the Imams. They declare: 'We are men and they are men'."[52]

He refused their arguments, comparing them to earlier scholars

> who put much effort into learning sciences that enabled them to understand the Quran and the Sunna, and transmitted their meanings through a chain that ended with the Companions, who took them [the sciences] from the Prophet."[53]

Being closer to the age of the prophet was enough for al-Nabhāni to consider the practice of *Ijtihād* a privilege that belonged to earlier scholars alone. Thus, scholars of the earliest generations of Islam and others who understood it "by their expertise in correct Arabic ... and by the light thrown from Allah in their hearts,"[54] were the only ones who should claim the right to apply *Ijtihād* in order to understand the Shari`a. He concluded that while earlier scholars were able to do this, people, excluding those with weak minds, now could not understand the Quran and the Sunna but through them and their interpretations. Reformers then, comparing their knowledge

---

[51] Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Al-Sihām al-sā'iba li ashāb al-da`āwa al-kādhiba fi al-rad `ala mudda`ī al-Ijtihād*. (n. p, n. d.): 9.
[52] Ibid: 21.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid. The existence of a supernatural talent that aided earlier scholars in discovering and explaining the law has always been a belief for Muqallids. See Peters. "Idjtihād and Taqlīd": 138.

to that of the earlier scholars, came to "belong to the common people and even less."[55] Al- Nabhāni targeted 'Abduh by alluding to him without mentioning his name. He accused him of having gone astray and described him as "ignorant and irreligious, who he thinks of himself as the leader of the Muslims."[56] He was accused by al-Nabhāni of befriending those who were also ignorant and irreligious. Aware of `Abduh's influence he warned people not to think of him as equal to Abu Hanifa and asked them to distinguish "that his statement we are men and they are men is wrong."[57] He also claimed that every time he met one of them he saw that he lacked reason and religion, he was rude, arrogant and ignorant.[58] They looked like hypocrites because, as he maintained, if a scholar argued with them they denied their beliefs and said that they followed the *Imams* instead. He accused them of not following the Quran and the Sunna although they claimed it. Rather they did evil things and they did not like righteousness.

One group that he despised even more he described as having a "spoiled taste" and lacking in religion and reasoning:

> they praised this century as a century of sciences, knowledge, virtues, good manners and refinement, and every good thing." They say: "The time of ignorance and savagery is gone and here is the time of sciences and modernization." They also say: "modern sciences, modernity..." Sometimes they claim: "people have become modern and enlightened and have their eyes open. Savagery has gone." These are lying statements indicating that people who are claiming them are ignorant... without a clear mind and cannot distinguish between right and wrong.[59]

---

[55] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Sihām al-sā'iba*: 22.
[56] Ibid: 22-23.
[57] Ibid: 23.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid: 24.

He refuted their judgement by comparing their claim to a *hadīth*, implying that the best centuries were those of the prophet, the companions, and their followers. Thus, he did not agree with them that this century was the best because his criterion to evaluate any century was the degree of practicing religion. However, for him, those who claimed *Ijtihād* did not care about religion, but followed western manners and despised Islamic traditions. He then concluded that this century, contrary to what they claimed, was the worst and the most evil,[60] and the only reason why they related themselves to it was because they were corrupt Muslims. The worst thing they did was to make religion conform to modern choices: "I heard one of them who is going to do this and write a commentary on the Quran that fits this century," in an allusion to *Tafsīr al-Manar* (the exegesis of *al-Manār*), initiated by 'Abduh and completed by Rida. When he was asked by one of his supporters to do the same and compose a commentary his reply showed his traditional and conservative attitude:

> I am not up to it and there are many levels between me and the level of commenting on the Quran. All my writings are a blend of benefits and most of them relate to the Prophet, his virtues, miracles and eulogies.[61]

The significant part of the answer was the statement that his writings did not rely on *opinion* but were based on emulation. Scholars, as he claimed, had already exhausted enough commentaries and exegesis. As these conformed to the taste of people from the last centuries they should fit those of the present one. Legal matters in the Quran should fit every human being and were equally relevant to every century and every time. Moreover, the Quran

---

[60] Ibid: 26.

for him had a uniform meaning regardless of time. It had no special meanings for earlier generations and others for later generations. If inclinations or the tastes of people conformed to the Quran, they should follow what had been explained; if they did not, then "why should we explain it the way they preferred it?"[62] This was by no means allowed because it was based on reason and "explaining the Quran by opinion is legally forbidden."[63] He continued discrediting the reformers by denying them honesty, piety and expertise in religious sciences, these being characteristics of scholars who can practice *Ijtihād*.

He perceived the harm they would cause to the Muslims as even more dangerous than that of the Wahhabis and other sects. This danger relied on the fact that they did not follow a specific school but were rather a mixture of all the schools "without any knowledge or piety."[64] The dissemination of their ideas in journals made them even more dangerous than the Wahhabis,[65] and their departure to "countries where people explicitly show their irreligion and rudeness such as in Egypt"[66] secured them a safe base to propagate and defend their ideas. He was annoyed by their increased number as well and their ability to contact each other as if "they belong to one school while in fact they do not have one but they are like freely grazing livestock, many of

---

[61] Ibid: 27.
[62] Ibid: 27-28.
[63] Ibid: 28.
[64] Ibid: 31.
[65] It is important to note here that reformers were very active in journalism, while the conservatives in general, and especially in Syria, were not as active. In Syria for example, they did not use journalism until after the re-establishment of the constitution. They published *al-Haqā'iq* in August 1910 but terminated it after three years. For more information, see Commins. *Islamic Reform*: 118-123.
[66] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Sihām al-Sā'iba*: 32.

them do not pray or worship, and commit various sins."[67] He anticipated that knowledgeable people would discredit their writings but he feared their influence on the common people.[68] Faced with a new means of transmitting knowledge, he warned against taking opinions from journals rather than original books. He also claimed that although Muslims had to imitate the scholars they should be careful not to imitate those who introduced innovations such as Ibn Taymiyya and his affiliates. Even the least important scholars of the early generations were more honest "because they [the reformers] are more sinful with their abandonment of prayer and the commitment of many prohibitions."[69] This was an important point in the arguments of al-Nabhāni. By discrediting the reformers he informed people that they could not be considered scholars and then followed this argument by a *hadīth*, which indicated that Muslims had to be careful from whom they were taking their religious knowledge. He devoted two pages to explaining this *hadīth* and concluded that those who cared for their religion should avoid the reformers and follow the rules of the established schools of jurisprudence. In addition, Muslims should be led by scholars affiliated with the established schools with the exception of Ibn Taymiyya and those who agreed with his mistakes on forbidding the intercession and the visit of the prophet.[70]

The frequent reference to Ibn Taymiyya was induced by the latter's growing influence following the introduction of the press in the Muslim world.

---

[67] Ibid: 38.
[68] Ibid: 31.
[69] Ibid: 34.
[70] Ibid: 37.

Most of his writings became known in the nineteenth century after the religious reformers in Damascus and Baghdad had gathered his manuscript collections. These books had a powerful impact on reformers and their interpretations of Islam. Among the books they published, and mentioned by al-Nabhāni, were Ibn Taymiyya's *The Distinction Between Allah's Saints and Satan's Saints,*[71] Ibn al-Qayyim's book *Aiding Those Struggling in Satan's Traps*[72] and Ibn `Abd al-Hādi' s *The Deplorable Sharp Reply to al-Subki*[73]

In 1902 al-Nabhāni wrote *Testimonies of Truth on Supplicating the Master of* Creatures,[74] in which he repeated his warnings on re-opening the gate of *Ijtihād,* defended Sufi practices and criticized Ibn Taymiyya, his students and the Wahhabis for their prohibition on visiting the tombs and asking for the intercession of the saints and the Prophet. The book seemed to have been responded to two events. First, as al-Nabhāni himself confessed, it was a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya' s *The Distinction,* of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Aiding Those Struggling,* Nu`mān Afandi al-Alusi's *Clearing the Eyes in Judging the Two Ahmads: Ibn Hajar and Ibn Taymiyya.*[75] Secondly, *Shawāhid al-haq* was published in the same year the Wahhabis recovered Najd and rejected Ottoman authority. It is highly probable that the book was intended to answer 'Abd a-Hamīd' s desire to undermine the Wahhabi influence.[76]

---

[71] *al-Furqān bayna awliyā' al-rahmān wa awliyā' al-shaytān.*
[72] *Ighāthat al-lahfān fi masā'id al-shaytān*
[73] *Al-Sārim al-mubkī fi al-radd `ala al-Subki.*
[74] Al-Nabhāni. *Shawāhid al-haq fi al-istighātha bi sayyid al-khalq.*
[75] *Jalā' al-`aynayn fi muhākamat al-ahmadayn ibn Hajar wa ibn Taymiyya* See Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Shawāhid al-Haqq*: 58.
[76] See Commins. *Islamic Reform*: 109.

The book began with an encomium by many scholars, followed by a two-part introduction. He repeated his earlier treatise on *Ijtihād* in the first part and devoted the second part to attacking Ibn Taymiyya and the Wahhabis. He then divided the book into eight sections in which he supported the legitimacy of visits to the prophets' and the saints' tombs and the efficacy of asking for their intercession. He added treatises against Wahhābism, written by Ahmad Dahlan, the Mufti of Mecca and copied others from several scholars who attacked IbnTaymiya and rebutted his arguments. He argued against Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, ibn 'Abd al-Hādi and al-Alūsi of Baghdad.[77] A section on Shi`ism followed, disproving its dogmas against the Companions. Although the book has been widely spread among the conservatives,[78] it did not include original arguments. Rather it repeated earlier arguments by conservative 'Ulama. As Commins indicated: "he cited ulama more often than the Qur'an or oral reports to buttress his points."[79]

The refutation of the exercise of *Ijtihād* was not only initiated by the threat the conservatives perceived to religious scholarship but also, even mainly, by their conservative framework of understanding and evaluating modernity and its impact on Muslim societies. *Ijtihād* became the recurrent need and the common ground for all religious reformers as well as the necessary tool to implement the reforms, legitimize them in the context of the Shari`a and get engaged in the process of modernization. However,

---

[77] Nu`mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Alūsi (1836-1899), the Iraqi reformer, was among the first to revive Ibn Taymiyya's legacy and recover him to other reformers. Ibid: 24-26.
[78] The edition I have been using was printed in 1990.
[79] Commins. *Islamic Reform.* 118.

since modernity, until the late nineteenth century, was still absent from the consciousness of the conservatives, the reformers' arguments on *Ijtihād* had no legal foundation in the eyes of the conservatives. Modernity and its countenance were seen as manifestations of evil, and attempts to assimilate them into everyday life were a heretical re-interpretation of Islam. This "reform" interpretation, as they perceived it, would profane Islam's sacred legal heritage and might lead to the extirpation of religion. Thus, practicing *Ijtihād* for al-Nabhāni was an exercise peculiar and necessary to the early period only. At the worst, its requirements were to be found in the scholars of the earlier period alone, who, as he maintained, exhausted all possible laws and conclusions. As a result, *Ijtihād* had no use anymore. Those who would use it, as he concluded, would do so only to legitimize their evil deeds. It was not an act of piety at all: on the contrary, it was an hypocrisy that would lead to infidelity. In addition, reason had no function in legal matters. It remained for al-Nabhāni, with *taqlīd*, the dichotomy of approaching not only the sources of Islam but also their application.

Yet the political implications of *Ijtihād* added to the debate. The conservatives who refused *Ijtihād* were the same scholars sponsored by 'Abd al-Hamīd. The "religious" opponents of the conservatives were the same "political" adversaries of the Ottoman ruler. Thus, the conservatives were not only defending their beliefs but also protecting the legitimate ground of the Ottoman establishment. As mentioned before, the issue of practicing *Ijtihād* was debated in the context of the legal abilities of the ruler. The reformers, by raising the issue again, implicitly doubted the ruler and the legitimacy of the Caliphate he was claiming. Second, assuming that the ruler was not a

Mujtahid, his confident scholars should be. This, however, was not possible because the conservatives, the majority of the 'Ulama-advisors of the Sultan, categorically denied *Ijtihād* and its practice. *Ijtihād*, promoted along with *Talfīq*, might also affect the founding legitimacy of the Ottomans who established the Hanafi School of law as *the* official one, to be uniformly followed throughout the empire.[80] Their choice of the Hanafi School was motivated primarilty by the Hanafi interpretation of the Caliphate. This School did not give much weight to the relation between lineage and rule, but instead, emphasized the abilities of the ruler. A ruler that could uphold the Shari`a and protect Islam, regardless of whether he was an Arab from Quraysh or not, was to be recognized as the legitimate sovereign of the Muslims. As a result, the Hanafi School was adopted as *the* political theory of the Empire and applied as *the* only judicial School. The *Tanzimāt* themselves did not question this practice.[81] The significance of adopting *one* school of jurisprudence might have alarmed the Sultan's about the dangerous implications of *Talfīq* and polarized his `Ulama protégés to nullify the role of *Ijtihād*. Consequently, another dimension of the Sultan's support to the regimen of *Taqlīd* and its adherents could be explained.

The conservative rejection of the issue of *Ijtihād* intermingled with the fear it could bring to the standard of Muslim scholarship, with the negligence of changes taking place in Muslim societies under the impact of modernity, and with criticism of the sultan and his policy. The remedy for this situation

---

[80] In fact, on one occasion, which will be discussed later, the conservatives rebutted legal opinions of 'Abduh, accusing him of not following the judgement of the Hanafi school.

[81] See, for instance, Fareed. *Legal Reform*, 129.

and the alternative to these calls of reform were eulogies of the prophet, and engagement in praising him, a task at which al-Nabhāni excelled.[82]

[82] An excerpt of the poem in which al-Nabhāni mentioned the aforementioned suggestion is inserted in *al-Sihām al-Sāiba* but found originally in his 4 volume *al-Majmū`a al-Nabhāniyya*, in which he composed and collected eulogies of the Prophet. See Yūsuf al-Nabhāni. *Al-majmū`a al-nabhāniyya fī al-madā'ih al-nabawiyya*. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n. d.).

Chapter V

Apostasy and Political Incorrectness

Introduction

The polemics of al-Nabhāni against the reformers and the "modern" age reached their peak in his *ad hominem Short "R" Poem in Defaming Innovation and Praising the Esteemed Tradition*[1], in which he assaulted them and did not refrain from using any inappropriate language to describe their (mis)conduct and (dis)beliefs. Although the rhythmic poem was not an analytical response to the reformers but rather the peak of al-Nabhāni's polemics and one of his most significant publications, it can be considered an important source on the modern debate between Hamīdien conservatives and reformers. It has no specific date of publication but from its content one concludes that it was written between 1908 and 1909. The title itself defined the frame of its context: it approached what al-Nabhāni defined as the dichotomy of "innovation" and "Tradition" (*Sunna*). Innovation, which was equal to "modern", was the product of the reformers who were set by him in opposition to the Tradition, understood as symbolic Islam, which he was called to defend. The treatise was divided into eight sections. He started by praising God, the Prophet, the Quran and the *Sunna*, the four Imams and their schools of legal interpretation. The second, third and fourth sections were devoted to denouncing al-Afghāni, `Abduh and Rida respectively. In the

---

[1] Yūsuf al-Nabhāni . *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra fi dham al-bid`a wa madh al-sunna al-gharra*, 4th ed. (n. p., n. d.). The poem has around 450 verses and is entitled the short "R" because there is another longer "R" poem (seven hundred fifty verses) in which al-Nabhāni compared Islam to Judaism and Christianity.

fifth he wrote against Wahhabism in general and some Wahhabi scholars, contemporaries of al-Nabhāni. The sixth and last section of the poem, consisted of eulogies of the prophet and lamentation for Islam and Muslims. The seventh section, an appendix to the tract, was a summary of his warnings against the reformers and their "innovations". The eighth and last section included forty *hadīths*, attacking innovations and defending Tradition.

The unusually strong tone that al-Nabhāni used in this particular tract suggests an increasing tension between the two camps, a development that could have been the result of the constitutional revolution of the Young Turks and the deposition of `Abd al-Hamīd. The Young Turks, the inheritors of the Young Ottomans in the 1890's, was a group of Ottomans from different ethnic backgrounds, advocating the integrity of the Ottoman Dynasty, resisting imperialism, and opposing the "despotism" of `Abd al-Hamīd. Their activities resulted in the restoration of the constitution after their revolution in 1908 and in the deposition of `Abd al-Hamīd in 1909. The Young Turks included Muslim reformers of Arab origin, such as Rashīd Rida who devoted many pages of *al-Manār* to promote the Young Turks' program. However, one of the major factions of the Young Turks was the centralist Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Its centralization policy and Turkification program following the revolution resulted in the dissolution of the Young Turks into different groups thus, causing deterioration in the relations between Turks and Arabs.[2]

---

[2] For more details, see Feroz Ahmad. *The Young Turks: The Committte of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics 1908-1914*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), and Kayali. *Arabs and Young Turks*.

As mentioned before, al-Nabhāni lost his job in Beirut as a result of the revolution as well as his alliance with the court. This time, al-Nabhāni found his political support in the person of the Khedive `Abbās II,[3] who seemed to have asked al-Nabhāni to continue his attack against the reformers in return for a salary from the department of the Egyptian Endowments.[4]

The general purpose of his poem was mentioned by its author at the end of the first section: "I have directed soldiers to defeat His enemies although you may see a poem. All the five sections have been victorious."[5] After praising the Qur'an and showing its high status and importance he explained the two levels of its interpretation. On the first, the text is "explicit and can be understood with no need to imitate any scholar."[6] As to the second, the implicit or the hidden meaning, it is necessary that "we imitate our esteemed religious leaders,"[7] to be able to understand it. Reaffirming the importance of the established Schools, he described Abu Hanīfa, Malek, al-Shāfi`i and ibn Hanbal, among those leading scholars who were important, guided by the spirit of the prophet, pious, and whose knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunna was both exceptional and divine. Their Schools, which

---

[3] The Khedive `Abbās II, the viceroy of Egypt, was interested in defaming the reformers because of his continuous conflict with Muhammad `Abduh as we will see below. His support to al-Nabhāni was not provoked by his interest in opposing "religious reform" but more by his tense relation with `Abduh. The motives of `Abbās cannot be studied in the same context of those of `Abd al-Hamīd.

[4] Al-`Awdāt. *Min A`lām al-fikr wa al-adab:* 619. See also *al-Manār*, Vol. 30: 142, where al-*Manār* described al-Nabhāni as "the liar and Beiruti poet who was hired by an influential man in Egypt to attack `Abduh and his plan. Thus, he [al-Nabhāni] found it essential to attack his wise teacher al-Sayyed al-Afghāni and his disciple the owner of *al-Manār* because the reform which he opposed has elevated them. However, before that, the used to praise the Imam [`Abduh] in his sayings and writings."

[5] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra:* 3.

[6] Ibid: 4.

"constitute the walls of the Muslim house,"[8] and which were even "equal to the Quran and the Sunna because they are the same but with different wordings," had always guided the Muslims. Besides, none of the scholars who had elaborated on these schools ever claimed *Ijtihād* outside the boundaries of one of these Schools.[9] Otherwise, he explained, such *Ijtihād* would be considered "independent and a study of passion, leading to evil only."[10] Even though al-Nabhāni admitted the existence of a *Mujaddid* (renewer of religion) in every century he did not associate him with *Ijtihād*.[11] A *Mujaddid*, as he defined him, was a pious and knowledgeable person but had no claim to the exercise of *Ijtihād*.[12]

Al-Afghāni: "The Apostate"

His repetitive introduction was the prelude to placing the reformers in the framework of his original discussion, which commenced in the second part with a description of "al-Afghāni and his innovative followers, who claim *Ijtihād*, corrupt on earth, and when they are asked not to make mischief on earth they reply: We are only reformers."[13] According to al-Nabhāni, none of

---

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid: 5.
[9] Ibid: 6.
[10] Ibid.
[11] The idea that every century has a *Mujaddid* relied on the following prophetic *hadith*: "God sends at the turn of every century a man who renovates the matters of the Ummah' s religion." *Ijtihād* was regarded as a prerequisite for *Tajdīd*, and every designated *mujaddid* was a *mujtahid*. See Hallaq. "*Was the Gate of Ijtihād Closed*": 27-28.
[12] Ibid.
[13] The following is a verse from the Quran of which al-Nabhāni said that it applied to the reformers who thought of themselves as refomers while they were indeed corrupting religion. Ibid: 6.

the misled groups in the history of Islam had ever claimed to be "reformers" of the religion but this group; thus, the aforementioned Qur'anic verse applied on them perfectly. The first among those reformers who corrupted Muslim societies was al-Afghāni whose image and history, along with those of 'Abduh and Rida, were reconstructed by al-Nabhāni in harmony with his campaign to invalidate their reforms and negate their influence on Muslims.

His starting point was to doubt al-Afghāni' s origin[14] and accuse him of trying to corrupt the religion of his own community. This attempt to 'reforming' was the reason, al-Nabhāni believed, caused al-Afghani' s exile[15]. After repeating the statement that no one for centuries had claimed *Ijtihād* he underscored his own surprise that al-Afghāni 's claimed this century needed different laws, and thus required the exercise of *Ijtihād*. Because of this "innovation", people called him the "greatest reformer". Al-Nabhāni here indirectly blamed the Egyptians by repeating his discontent with the activities of the reformers in Egypt where al-Afghāni was exiled and "where he was spreading his evil."[16] During al-Afghāni's residency in Egypt, al-Nabhāni had

---

[14] Al-Afghāni, as his surname indicated, insisted he was of Afghan origin. However, his opponents doubted his claim and attributed him Shi`i origins, accusations supported by modern scholarship. See Keddie. *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī"*: Chapters II & III.

[15] Although al-Nabhāni accused al-Afghāni of trying to corrupt the religion of the Afghans, the biography of al-Afghāni does not indicate any religious or reform activities during the two years he spent in Afghanistan (1866-68). The reason why Shir `Ali expelled him from Afghanistan was pure political. For more details on his activities in Afghanistan see Keddie. *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghāni:* 37-57. Abul Huda called him *al-Muta'afghin* (who claims to be an Afghan) and asserted he was a Persian from Mazandaran. Hourani. *Arabic Thought:* 108.

[16] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Rā`iyya al-sughra*: 7. Al-Nabhāni expressed his statement in the following wordings: He is such an ugly *Sheikh* but it [Egypt] is such a good country. Under the Khedive's rule, Egypt was semi-independent of the Ottoman rule. Theoretically, the Khedive "was the Sultan's vassal invested by the Sultan and formally exercising power in accordance with the Sultan's firmans." However, they had uneasy relations, and the Khedive's power was the existence of the opposition

the chance to meet him in 1869. According to al-Nabhāni's story, he discredited al-Afghāni after two incidents. The first was when al-Afghani had a debate with an Azhirite Sheikh,[17] who then insulted him and asked him to leave because he "showed signs of heterodoxy and atheism."[18] The second, as al-Nabhāni stated later in his poem, was because he was spent time in al-Afghani's company and did not see al-Afghāni performing his regular prayers.

Al-Nabhāni traced the first signs of al-Afghāni's "heresy" in his lectures on Philosophy, which as he admitted, made al-Afghani very popular. Yet Al-Afghāni's "plan" was completed when he met `Abduh, and told him about "erasing all the Schools so that this religion turns virgin again."[19] Here al-Nabhāni started to criticize the movement that al-Afghāni originated and belonged to, and not al-Afghāni alone. Al-Nabhāni was dissatisfied with the large number of its followers and their spread in the Muslim world.[20] He described them as aiming at making Islam into a religion of ignorance, omitting a lot of its rulings, and behaving like "devils among Muslims to corrupt them."[21] Al-Nabhāni was not totally surprised since he believed that what the reformers were doing was mentioned in the Qur'an (in reference to the above verse). He described them as *khawārij*[22] and accused them of

---

under his sovereignty. For more information on the relation between the Khedive and the Sultan see L. Hirszowicz. "The Sultan and the Khedive, 1892-1908." *Middle Eastern Studies* 8(October, 1972).

[17] He later in his *Ra'iyya* mentioned the name of this Sheikh who was one of al-Nabhāni's tutors at *al-Azhar* whose name was `Abd al-Rahmān al-Shirbīni. Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Rā'iya*: 38.

[18] Ibid: 7

[19] Ibid: 8

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] *Khawārij* is derived from the Arabic verb *Kharaja*, which means to go or to leave. The Khawarij was a political faction which abandoned the general body of the

imitating the Protestants of Christianity by claiming *Ijtihād*,[23] confirming the saying of the prophet that a day would come when the Muslims would be following the Christians.[24] He could find excuses for Protestant Christians but not for Muslims since "God said that he had completed the religion and thus, they had no justification to their claim". The only reason for their call, he believed, was to promote themselves, and only those "at the bottom of knowledge" would accept this claim.[25] By exercising *Ijtihād*, without having knowledge and piety as prerequisites to its practice, they had become unrestrained Muslims.[26] Therefore, he rejected their fundamental call that they were *imams* like the others:

> They claim that the Qur'an and the Sunna are sufficient but there is no one one among them who memorizes a *hadith* or a chapter of the Qur'an. Even when they read them they are not able to understand. If they do, they do not follow their commandments. They are anarchists[27], and liars. When they are asked to pray they reply that they would pray at home... If they are asked not to drink [alcohol] they say they drink it with the intention of healing or they say it is not called alcohol.[28]

Muslims as early as the eighth century and had its own political theory. They were considered a heretic faction by most Sunni scholars.

[23] The actual resemblance between the Protestant movement in Christianity and the Salafiyya movement in Islam is not necessary here. What is important is al-Nabhāni 's definition for this resemblance. In his commentary on his *Ra'iyya* he defined the Protestants in Christianity as those who "claimed reforming Christianity by abandoning previous interpretations and suffice by relying on the rulings in the Old and the New Testament. That is why they called themselves 'the Reformers' ". However, the Muslims could not claim the same because "what the Christians added to their Testaments was not original... But the scholars of Islam did not add any personal opinions because their judgements were either based on the Quran and the Sunna or based on consensus and analogy." Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Ra'iyya*: 36-37.

[24] Al-Nabhāni supported his conclusion br refering to a prophetic report saying that a day will come when Muslims will be imiating Christians in everything, even if they were wrong. Ibid: 9.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid: 10. Unrestrained would mean someone who does not confine to the teachings of the religion.

[27] He used the term *Ibahiyyīn*, designating them as freethinkers who were not restrained by religion.

[28] Ibid: 10.

He inferred that they were as bad as this century, which they called a century of "enlightenment" and he considered a century that was moving people away from their religion.[29] They were among those whom the century corrupted, as he maintained, and became atheists and enemies to believers and to Islam.[30] Their threat to Islam was seen as greater than that posed by "unbelievers" because Muslims could be wary of the latter but easily fooled by Muslims disguised as reformers. This danger was found in their many publications, books and periodicals, which al-Nabhāni consistently attacked and warned people from.[31]

This dislike, if not hatred, for al-Afghāni, was motivated not only by al-Afghāni 's religious beliefs but also by his political activities, which upset the Sultan as well as the conservatives. In addition to his call to promote the role of reason in Islam and to re-introduce the function of *Ijtihād*, al-Afghāni was a political enthusiast. After his enforced departure from Istanbul in 1871 (because of his speech at the new university, the Darülfünun), a speech that turned the conservatives, including Sheikh al-Islam, against him, he came back in 1892.[32] Whether he tried to first approach the Sultan or whether the

---

[29] Ibid: 11.

[30] There have been some academic studies doubting the sincerety of al-Afghāni and Abduh's piety. See for instance, Elie Kedourie. *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*. (London: Frank Cass & CO. LTD, 1966).

[31] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra*: 13.

[32] The speech appealed for modern education and forwarded the example of "civilized nations". He asked for the abandonment of the traditional educational system, which produced nothing but "ease and laziness", and "remained in the corners of the madrasas and the dervish convents." Religious conservatives accused al-Afghāni of heresy. The charge against him was accompanied by a campaign to target the new university in Istanbul, which included in its curriculum, besides technological and scientific fields, Law and Philosophy, posing a threat to traditional

latter was anxious to have him in the court because of his enthusiasm for pan-Islam, anti-colonialism and his efforts to improve relations between Shi'ism and Sunnism is not the issue.[33] What is important is that al-Afghāni finally came to Istanbul in 1892 and died there as the court' s prisoner. The person who pushed al-Afghāni to come to Istanbul and who ultimately turned the Sultan against him was Abu al-Huda al-Sayyādi. Al-Sayyādi sent two letters to al-Afghāni in London convincing him to come to Istanbul, where he was promised "the protection of his brothers in religion and an easy life, close to the great Caliph."[34] It is more likely that the reason why al-Sayyādi was interested in bringing al-Afghāni to Istanbul was to put him under direct control, especially that he was aware of his claims and aspirations. Both the Sultan and al-Sayyādi were receiving *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Firmest Bond) published in Paris in 1884 by both al-Afghāni and `Abduh. A very influential and reputable journal,[35] it dealt mainly with British imperialism, pan-Islam, and, most importantly, the re-interpretation of Islam to respond to current issues. The content of its articles should have aroused the concern of both the Sultan and his advisor, al-Sayyādi.

Moreover, Al-Afghāni 's own plan of pan-Islam was not to satisfy 'Abd al-Hamīd. He first founded a Pan-Islamic society in Mecca in 1885, called *Um*

---

religious institutions. For more details, see Keddie. *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghāni"* : 58-80.

[33] Standard biographies emphasize on `Abd al-Hamīd's interest in recruiting al-Afghāni to Istanbul. However, Nikki R. Keddie argued first in an article published in 1966 and later in her voluminous biography on al-Afghāni that the latter established dealings with `Abd al-Hamid in 1885. See Nikki R. Keddie. "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdülhamid II." *Middle Eastern Studies* 3(October 1966): 46-67 and *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghāni"*: 130-131.

[34] Keddie. *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "Al-Afghāni"*: 370 and Rida. *Tārīkh:* 88.

[35] Al-`Urwa al-wuthqa was short-lived. It appeared for eighteen months only.

al-Qura (the name is one of Mecca's) with the aim of promoting the idea of one Caliph over the whole Islamic world. However, the society was suppressed by `Abd al-Hamīd one year after its foundation.[36] Moreover, the Sultan suspected that al-Afghāni was involved in a scheme of an Arab Caliphate drawn by Wilfred Blunt. Blunt was a British aristocrat poet, opposed to imperialism, and an admirer of Arab lands. He traveled with his wife to Egypt in 1880, where he met Muhammad `Abduh and heard of al-Afghāni for the first time. Their common activities led the Sultan to believe they were working in the direction of founding an Arab Caliphate. When al-Afghāni reached Istanbul the Sultan's suspicions grew after al-Afghāni' s meeting with the Khedive `Abbas in Istanbul, in the summer of 1895. It was reported to the Sultan that `Abbas was plotting for an Arab Caliphate to be held by himself and that he secretly met with al-Afghāni to discuss this idea.[37]

Al-Afghāni's mistrust of the Sultan was also reported by Rashīd Rida who noted that Hussayn al-Jisr[38] often heard al-Afghāni undermining the credibility of the Sultan who believed that al-Afghāni spied on him to *The Times*. Rida also mentioned that he heard that al-Afghāni was plotting to dethrone both the Ottoman and the Persian Sultans.[39]

---

[36] Adams. *Islam and Modernism*: 9-10.
[37] Keddie. *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "Al-Afghāni"*: 383.
[38] Hussein al-Jisr (1845-1909) was a unique scholar and head of the Khalwatiyya order in Tripoli, Lebanon. He was among the first Sufi scholars to appreciate the importance of European languages and modern sciences. See Khaled Ziyada. *Al-Shaykh Hussein al-Jisr: hayatuhu wa fikruhu*. (Tripoli: Dar al-Insha', 1982).
[39] Rida. *Tārīkh*: 72.

Al-Sayyādi had already denounced al-Afghāni to the Sultan by accusing him of irreligion and heresy. He even convinced the Sultan not to support al-Afghāni's project to reconciliation between the Shi`is and Sunnis.[40] When he died, journals that commemorated him were not allowed to circulate.[41]

`Abduh: "The Active Devil"

`Abduh, al-Afghāni ' s disciple was not spared from similar criticism, spurred by his position as *Mufti* of Egypt. As al-Afghāni' s origin was controversial, al-Nabhāni also doubted `Abduh' s, claiming he was Copt.[42] He accused him of causing Muslims more suffering from the moment he became the Mufti of Egypt, comparing him to Abū Jahl.[43] Thus, instead of reviving Islam he had revived *Jāhiliyya*, especially by his Fatwas, which al-Nabhāni criticized as being according to `Abdus's passion and blended by his ignorance. The worst thing that `Abduh learned from al-Afghāni were philosophy and the call for *Ijtihād*, with which, al-Nabhāni warned, he was misleading people who were affiliated to the Schools. For al-Nabhāni, `Abduh was not sincere in his religion since he was concerned with earthly matters, followed "people of unbelief", and imitated them despite his claim to be a religious leader.[44] 'Abduh, al-Nabhāni continued, also took every opportunity to attack pious Muslims, to whom he preferred unbelievers. If some people considered

---

[40] Keddie. *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "Al-Afghāni"*: 417.
[41] Rida. *Tārīkh*: 91
[42] This claim had no reference. Unlike al-Afghāni , no one doubted Abduh' s origin.
[43] He was a figure at the time of the Prophet, known for his torture for Muslims and persistent refusal of Islam.
[44] Ibid: 15.

`Abduh pious, al-Nabhāni warned them that they should reconsider their opinion, because according to religious values, "all that he was doing was evil."[45]

`Abduh's exile to Syria helped him recruit more supporters, whom al-Nabhāni accused of establishing a new School upon his return to Egypt, "and thus made Egypt dirty."[46] He accused him of befriending the British and collaborating with them, and imitating the Protestants. In return, he was secured the influential and prestigious position as the Grand mufti of Egypt, in allusion to Lord Cromer's support for `Abduh. Al-Nabhāni cautioned people against his Qur'anic exegesis described to be conforming to `Abduh's own opinions,[47] especially because he acknowledged "the virtues of the atheist Europeans and every one who had an innovation, such as Ibn Taymiyya, whom `Abduh followed in his innovations but not in piety and good deeds."[48] His ideas looked so much like a radical departure from the perspective of conservative Islam that al-Nabhāni suspected that even the Wahhabis, whom `Abduh praised, would not accept many of them. Besides his befriending the British, `Abuh was accused of having relations with Christian women, of drinking alcohol, of never performing the duty of Pilgrimage,[49] and of not praying regularly.[50] Hassan al-Istiwāni's dream,[51] in which al-Afghāni

---

[45] Ibid: 16.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid: 17
[48] Ibid.
[49] Al-Nabhāni wondered why `Abduh visited Paris and London but never went to Mecca. Rida's answer to such accusation was that `Abduh did not feel secure to go to Mecca, where the Sultan had much emphasis since the Sultan was upset with him. He was waiting for a good opportunity when he could feel safe. See Rida. *Tārīkh*: 947-948
[50] Al-Nabhāni . *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra*: 17-18 He claimed he was in his company from

appeared as similar to *A`war al-Dajjāl*,[52] was another "proof" for al-Nabhāni that `Abduh was irreligious and a hypocrite.

Naturally, Al-Nabhāni raised the issue of the Transvaal *Fatwas* issued by `Abduh as well. Some Muslims from Transvaal asked `Abduh if it was legally permissible to eat the meat of cows slaughtered by Christians, to wear hats while dealing in business with Europeans, and for the Hanafis to pray behind the Shafi`is. `Abduh was permissive in these three cases.[53] The conservative *`Ulama* objected to his answers and took the opportunity to question his ability for *Ifta'*. The two focal points were whether he was allowed to use his *Ijtihād* in order to give this response, and whether he was allowed to judge using Māliki proofs in a judicial system that relied exclusively on the Hanafi School. The issue was raised in newspapers and `Abduh's adversaries, supported by the Khedive, hoped to have him discharged from his position.[54] They failed however, due to the support and confidence of Lord Cromer in `Abduh.[55] Another motive for this opposition was the reforms in al-Azhar carried out by 'Abduh and his supporters. Although Khedive `Abbās initially approved the project, he did not expect the committee to decide and act independently of his will or opinion. When he

---

morning until sunset and did not see him pray. This was not a new accusation. In fact, `Abduh' s adversaries were accusing him of not performing the daily prayer. Rashid Rida inserted a photo of 'Abduh praying in his biography to show that he did perform his prayer even when he was in Europe, but confessed that sometimes he used to combine two prayers together. See Rida.*Tārīkh*: 1042.

[51] He died in 1930 and was a contemporary of al-Nabhāni . Muhammad Mutī` al-Hāfez & Nizār Abāza.*Tārīkh `ulama' Dimashq fi al-qarn al-rābi` `ashar al-hijri.* Vol.1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 199): 447.

[52] Otherwise known as the Antichrist. The Arabic term means the one-eyed imposter.

[53] Rida. *Tārīkh*: 668-690.

[54] Rida. *Tārīkh:* 671-674.

[55] For more information on the cordial relation between Lord Cromer and `Abduh,

found that his order concerning one of the internal affairs was not taken into consideration, and after Abduh's unsatisfactory answer to him, the Khedive started to collaborate with Muhammad Tawfiq al-Bakri[56] against 'Abduh to force him to resign from the committee. When Lord Cromer intervened again, the Khedive raised the issue of `Abduh's Transvaal *Fatawa,* and encouraged conservative scholars to attack him and accuse him of being a Wahhabi.[57]

Al-Nabhāni, who looked at `Abduh with much suspicion, had as well his own reasons to attack him. Like al-Afghāni, Muhammad `Abduh was critical of *Taqlīd* and Sufi practices. In his treatise *Theology of Unity*, he described how imitation deceived Muslims and led them to backwardness. Because the "obscurantists" destroyed "the remaining traces of the rational temper which had its source in the Islamic faith", students found themselves limited to "mere wrangles about words and scrutiny of methods."[58] He compared them to people mentioned in the Quran, whose desire to follow their fathers lead to the destruction of their community.[59] Anyway, he associated the rise of the *Taqlīd* group with the rise of the Turkish states in Islamic history and

> what `Abduh wrote of the Turks in the Middle Ages he would equally have applied to the Ottoman Sultans. They too, in his eyes, were the pillars of unintelligent conservatism in matters of religion.[60]

---

see The Earl of Cromer. *Modern Egypt.* (London: Macmillan 7 Co., 1908).

[56] He was the head of the Bakriyya order in Egypt. For more details see De Jong. *Turuk and Turuk-Linked Institutions.*

[57] See *Mudhakkarāti* in which Shafiq Pasha, the head of the Khedival Diwan and Deputy of the Egyptian University, gave full details of the incident, and al-Bakri's attempts to exploit the disagreement between the Khedive and the Mufti. Shafiq Pasha himself participated in the attempts to reconcile the situation between the Khedive and `Abduh. Shafiq Pasha. *Muzakkarāti*, Vol.2: 34-39.

[58] `Abduh, *Theology of Unity:* 38.

[59] Ibid: 39.

[60] Hourani: *Arabic Thought*: 151.

'Abduh did not like the Sultan himself, whom he accused of "ignorance" and "cowardice" and association with the Sufis and their *Sheikhs*.[61] He considered `Abd al-Hamīd ignorant of the meaning and responsibilities of a Caliphate. He favored an Arab caliph and believed that the Arabs deserved independence and civilization. The Turks, however, led them to ignorance.[62]

Rida: "Perpetuator of Evil"

Continuing his assault, al-Nabhāni considered Rashīd Rida, `Abduh's biographer and student, the less knowledgeable and the most evil of their reform group. Al-Nabhāni claimed that when he met him in Beirut for the first time he had no beard. For him, this was his early sign of apostasy. When he saw him fifteen years later he was still without a beard.[63] He refused to accept Rida's claim to be a descendant of the prophet, reminding the reader that Rida's cousin had previously denounced this lineage. Al-Nabhāni concluded from the content of *al-Manār* as well that Rida showed signs of atheism,[64] and thus had no claim to the lineage of the Prophet. Al-Nabhāni maintained that Rida was exiled to Egypt because he betrayed his country and his religion.[65] When he was sponsored by 'Abduh, the latter became his

---

[61] `Abduh was mainly referring to Abu al-Huda, whom he suspected was looking forward to claiming the Caliphate for himself. Rida. *Tārikh*: 913.
[62] Ibid: 913-914.
[63] Portraits of Rida show him with a beard and the religious custom of *'Ulama*.
[64] Al-Nabhāni . *Al-Ra'iyya*: 21.
[65] In fact, Rida left his town after he was persecuted by al-Sayyadi and his men. Rida was trying to oppose Sufi activities and he wrote *al-Hikma al-Shar`iyya fi muhakamat al-Qadiriyya wa al-Rifa`*iyya. Al-Sayyadi, who was the head of the Rifa`i order did not allow the book to be distributed, and seemed to have intervened to Badri Pasha, a relative of Sayyadi, who became the Mutasarrif of Tripoli, to persecute Rida. He then decided to leave to Egypt and stay with Abduh and al-Afghāni . See

spiritual teacher and helped him launch *al-Manār*, which, for al-Nabhāni, confirmed Rida's loss of faith.[66] Al-Nabhāni referred again to his dreams to confirm the perdition of Rida.[67] Just as he had done in the case of `Abduh, he accused Rida's *Fatwas* as being "given in accord with his [Rida's] own opinion, allowing what is forbidden, and forbidding what is allowed, which ultimately was the work of the Devil.[68] Al-Nabhāni asked the Muslims in general, and Egyptians in particular, to react against him, wondered aloud "why they were still patient with someone who was the Prophet's enemy."[69] He wanted them to do as the Syrians did during Rida' s trip to both Tripoli and Syria. People who fought him there were regarded by al-Nabhāni as similar to the Prophet's relatives and Companions who fought with the Prophet to protect Islam.[70] During Rida's first trip to Tripoli, as Rida himself narrated, he was struck on the head by someone while greeting the receptionists. The same person also attempted to kill Rida by firing gun shots at him.[71] Rida implicitly accused al-Sayyādi of provoking the incident by referring to the assailants as being the same people who had harassed his brothers.[72] The other episode that al-Nabhāni referred to was a very famous

---

Wajīh Kawtharāni. *Rashīd Rida: Mukhtārāt siyasiyya min majallat al-Manār*. (Beirut: Dār al-Talī`a, 1980): 12-13.

[66] Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra*: 21.

[67] Al-Nabhāni claimed that he saw Rida in his dream with a black face although he was white. This, he concluded was a sign that *al-Manār* destined Rida to "hellfire". Ibid: 22.

[68] Ibid: 23.

[69] Ibid: 23.

[70] Ibid: 25.

[71] See Yūsuf Ibish (ed.). *Rahalāt al-imām Muhammad Rashīd Rida*. (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-`arabiyya li al-dirasat wa al-nashr, 1971): 13.

[72] Rida recorded in *al-Manār* that al-Sayyadi asked his cousin Badri Pasha, governor of Tripoli then, to persecute Rida' s family, and send his brothers to military service despite their exemption as students. Rida also mentioned that al-Sayyādi had

one, mentioned in both the memoirs of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimi[73] (who was among those who sponsored Rida's trip to Syria), and in *al-Manār*. After four days in Beirut, and upon his arrival at Damascus on 23 October 1908, Rida gave a lecture in the Umayyad mosque in the presence of a big audience. He was asked for another one the next day.[74] Afterwards, he was asked his opinion on books of jurisprudence. At that point, he was interrupted by the Rifā'i Sheikh Sāleh al-Tūnisi[75] and by `Abd al-Qāder al-Khatīb, both followers of al-Sayyādi. Al-Tūnisi proclaimed the legitimacy of tomb visits and saints' supplication, knowing about Rida's criticism of these practices, and urged Muslims to follow the four Imams and emulate them. Al-Khatīb tried to reply as well but Rida was then asked to leave. Al-Tūnisi was arrested after the incident by the Police Chief As`ad Darwīsh who had to depart from the city under the pressure of the conservatives, and Rida was asked to leave Damascus as soon as possible.[76] Al-Nabhāni's conclusion was that Rida should learn a lesson from the death of his teachers al-Afghāni and `Abduh. He also reminded him again that 'Abduh had never performed the pilgrimage

---

planned to send someone to Egypt to kill him and then claim his death as a miracle for al-Sayyādi, the way he claimed al-Afghāni 's death to be another miracle. *Al-Manār*. 2(1899): 236-7.

[73] Zafer al-Qāsimi. *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimi wa 'asruhu*. (Damascus: Maktabat Atlas, n. d.).

[74] Al-Qāsimi did not know who requested the next lesson. They could have been Rida's supporters or his enemies who had arranged the incident, or they could be both. See Al-Qāsimi. *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimi:* 446.

[75] Al-Qāsimi refrained from mentioning al-Tunisi's name in his book but his name appeared in other record, among them the poem of al-Nabhāni and an article sent to *al-Manār*.

[76] It seemed that Al-Tūnisi and his circle kept propagandizing against the reformers and especially 'Abduh and his *Theology of Unity*. A Damascene religious student sent a letter to *al-Manar* inquiring about some ideas in Abduh's book since al-Tunisi was misinterpreting them. This letter was sent to Rida in 1910. See *al-Manār*. Vol. 13: 419-423.

although he visited Paris and London many times and did not pray regularly. Moreover, he was initiated in the Masons.[77]

Rashīd Rida was more critical of the Ottoman establishment and the Sultan, and used his pulpit, *al-Manār*, to call for religious and political reforms. Although the journal dealt only with religious reforms in the first six years after its publication, and did not directly address political reforms, it was forbidden in parts of the Empire under the direct control of `Abd al-Hamīd, like Syria for example, because it was continuously mentioning that ruling in Islam should be based on *Shura* (consultation).[78] But following al-Sayyādi's harassment of Rida's brothers in Tripoli, and the outright sabotage of al-Manār' s publication office, the paper shifted to a more political venue. Rida started to publish exerts from his book *The Legal Opinion in Judging the Qādiriyya and the Rifā`iyya* (in response to al-Sayyādi), a work which caused his expulsion from Lebanon in the first place. Al-Sayyādi took it personally and tried to silence him by offering him ranks in the *'Ulama* hierarchy. When this failed to silence Rida, he started to harass him. This, which also coincided with the death of `Abduh, led Rida to become more critical of the Ottoman regime, to criticize the "Despotic" Hamīdien policy, and to begin to promote political reforms. In 1906, he wrote that, along with the Sufis who were holding the *Ummah* back,[79] one of the major reasons of the backwardness of the Muslims was the existence of bad political rulers.[80]

---

[77] Rida however did not deny that `Abduh was initiated by al-Afghāni in the Masons. While he cited it in his *Tarikh,* he explained that at the time their impression on the Masons was different.
[78] Wajīh Kawtharāni. *Mukhtārāt siyasiyya*: 12-16.
[79] Ibid: 3(1909): 814-900.
[80] Ibid: 9(1906): 357.

Al-Nabhāni continued by criticizing Wahhabism, which he accused of disliking and disrespecting the Prophet. The wahhabis represented the Devil of whom the Prophet warned, and said he would rise from the East.[81] Their followers were not exclusively from the Hanbalite School only, belonging to others such as Shukri al-Alūsi.[82] Al-Alusi's uncle, Nu`mān Khayr al-Dīn had written a book, *A Clear View Of the Trial of the Two Ahmads*, defending Ibn Taymiyya against his critics. In *Testimonies of Truth* Al-Nabhāni devoted a chapter to refuting this book.[83]. Mahmūd Shukri al-Alūsi responded with a book entitled *The Utmost Purpose in Refuting al-Nabhāni,*[84] defending Wahhabism and arguing for the restoring of *Ijtihād.* Al-Nabhāni, in his *Rā'iyya,* accused al-Alūsi of favoring Ibn Taymiyya's teachings over those of the Prophet, and of rebutting scholars from all Schools.[85]

Another poem followed, sketching the historical glory of Islam, and lamenting the present condition of Muslims, caused by people like the reformers.[86] He despised the twentieth century, when "the pious have become the degraded and the damned the most distinctive."[87] He was also troubled about the "freedom of expression" which allowed 'apostates' to

---

[81] Al-Nabhāni relied on a Prophetic report that symbolized the rise of evil from the East. Al-Nabhāni. *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra*: 27.
[82] A Salafi from Baghdad, al-Alusi was the nephew of Khayr al-Dīn who was among the first to revive the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya and to be influenced by his writings. After his uncle death, Shukri continued the fight for reforms and established contacts with reformers in different cities in the Muslim world. See Commins. *Islamic Reform:* 26-28.
[83] Al-Nabhāni . *Shawāhid al-Haqq*: 288-298.
[84] Mahmūd Shukri al-Alūsi. *Ghāyat al-amāni fi al-radd `ala al-Nabhāni* . (Al-Iskandariyya: Dar Ihya' al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya, 1971-72).
[85] Al-Nabhāni . *Al-Rā'iyya al-sughra*: 29-31.
[86] Ibid: 31-36.
[87] Ibid: 34.

display their beliefs openly, without shame.[88] A summary of the poem followed, and the tract ended with forty *hadiths* on praising the "Tradition" once again, and refuting religious "innovation".

[88] Ibid.

Conclusion

Al-Nabhāni's writings and scholarly network point to the existence of an intellectual movement that is worth analysis beyond the parameters of the historiography of modern Islamic thought; a thought that has interacted with modernity at levels of absorption, assimilation and filtration. Al-Nabhāni's writings challenge the representation of Islamic thought in the late Ottoman period, lifting it beyond the Muslim appeal to modernity and locating it rather in the domain of rejection and resistance to modernity as well as to reform Islam. This 'antagonistic' perception of both inner changes in Muslim societies, perpetuated by the *Salafiyya* movement, and external influence, imposed by European Powers, was shaped by a conservative religious background that denied any interaction between the Islam someone like al-Nabhāni understood, and what was seen as 'alien'. Hence modernity for al-Nabhāni was a 'cultural' imposition on Islam which would eventually contaminate it with 'alien' ideas and institutions. As a result, there was no 'compromise' to be found between Islam and modernity. This would finally, as conceived by al-Nabhāni, pave the way to Islam's 'enemies' (Europe in particular) to dominate Muslims and change their allegiance from Islam to Christianity. Reformers who were appealing to modernity, and examining a possible harmony between Islam and the modern age were accused of heresy and treason to their religion and history. Reform was not for al-Nabhāni a different religious approach to changes taking place in Muslim societies but was rather a devilish concession of the traditions of Islam. Any change in the general understanding of Islam and any pragmatic negotiation

with modernization were seen by him as a manifestation of evil and corruption, leading to the extirpation of Islam. Al-Nabhāni was not concerned by or even alerted to military threats or military conquests since he considered the danger of cultural colonialism to outweigh the military one. Al-Nabhāni totally ignored aspects of military conquest in his writings –for him it was not even comparable to the dangers of cultural modernity.[1]

Ottoman politics at the time polarized the conservative-reform debate. The two opposing religio-political camps gave the conservative movement a better chance to protect itself, and a platform from which to defend its own version of Islam. `Abd al-Hamīd's policy of intense "Islamization" in the Dynasty and his challenge to the European cultural and military threat to the Muslim world drew him closer to conservatives, at the expense of religious reformers. Since reformers believed that the betterment of Muslim societies was related to reform in the political rule they earned the hostility of the Sultan, whose political agenda to claim himself the 'Caliph' of the Muslims was thereby threatened. Thus, he favored the reformers' enemies who needed a political umbrella under which they could launch their assault against reforms that were intimidating the conservative scholarly establishment, and could defend themselves and the Sultan against religion revisionism. Al-Nabhāni' s strategy was to affirm the legitimacy of the Sultan as Caliph by portraying him as the *de facto* ruler of Muslims, the heir of the Ottoman Dynasty, and the protector of Mecca and Medina. Al-Nabhāni's political 'manifesto' was held within a religious context, based on prophetic

[1] It is striking that al-Nabhāni, with his awareness of European potential danger on

reports and religious arguments, in an attempt to justify the claim of `Abd al-Hamīd.

His support for the ruler and his antagonism towards modernity and reform were repeated in his treatise against missionary schools and modern education. He took advantage of the official policy against missionary schools to criticize not only these schools and their activities but also what they stood for in terms of modern education. Unlike the reformers, al-Nabhāni did not believe sciences and languages could play a positive role in the life of Muslims, who, he argued were risking their faith and loyalty to Islam and its Dynasty by acquiring modern education.

His treatment of and attitude towards *Ijtihād* further revealed his hostile approach to modernity and reforms. Since *Ijtihād* was the tool to articulate reforms and authorize them within the legal scope of Islam, al-Nabhani fiercely objected to it. He claimed that *Ijtihād* was a requirement of the early period of Islam alone, which had enabled Muslim scholars to build the foundation of Islamic jurisprudence. In addition, he considered *Ijtihād* a privilege to scholars with divine knowledge but who did not exist anymore. Those who were exercising *Ijtihād* or even approving its use were regarded by al-Nabhāni as traitors to Islam, who had claimed knowledge of religious sciences to manipulate them in order to introduce modernity into Muslim societies. Moreover, by campaigning against *Ijtihād*, al-Nabhāni was defending the religious and political ground of the Ottoman Dynasty. Had *Ijtihād* been lega

Islamic political theories, in terms of the ability of the Muslim ruler or his affiliated *'Ulama* to practice it. Moreover, *Ijtihād*, associated with *talfiq* challenged the reliance of the Ottoman rule on *one* School, the *Hanafi* one as its official jurist and political School.

Al-Nabhāni culminated his anti-reform and anti-modernity campaign with a defamation of the reformers and their role in the subversion of Islam and Muslims.

Such a fierce debate between conservatives and reformers suggests that the conservative school of thought that al-Nabhāni represented was not marginal at the time but rather large and articulate, influential and combative. It was not confined to an individual city but was rather rooted in most of the Muslim world well beyond the Middle East and North Africa, and prominent in all its major cities.[2] Despite heavy criticism from religious reformers and advancement of "modern" theories, Muslim or secular, the conservative movement would not surrender its ground easily. The writings of al-Nabhāni in particular have been influential among conservatives and Sufis' circles both during his lifetime and today. The influence of his writings was felt in an Islamic world reaching as far as India, Malaysia and Indonesia. For example, in a letter sent to *al-Manār* in 1927, a certain Muhammad 'Abd al-Qāder from Malibar, India, described how he established a reform journal called *al-Islam*. Since *al-Islam* was obviously following the guidance of al-

[2] Besides Damascus, Aleppo and Cairo, they had heavy presence in Istanbul. For more details on their reaction to reforms, see David Farhi. The *Şeriat* as a Political Slogan-or the 'incident of the 31st Mart." *Middle Eastern Studies* 7(October, 1971): 275-299. Moreover, discussions on the pages of *al-Manār*, as aforementioned, provided a broader context of this debate, reaching, Southeast Asia and the Indian sub-continent.

Manār `Abd al-Qāder was accused of being Wahhabi and heretic, especially by some scholars who had been influenced by the writings of al-Nabhāni.[3]

The Hamidien sympathy and support for the conservatives adds another dimension and another meaning to `Abd al-Hamīd's pan-Islam policy. Hamidien pan-Islam has been frequently portrayed by historians as a tool to unite Muslims in the face of national appeals and European threats.[4] Yet his policy was also aimed at maintaining and protecting a conservative version of Islam, a version that was able to secure stability for the Ottoman rule by the late Ottoman period on one hand, and at spreading his hostile attitude against European intrusion and influence in an already weak Dynasty on the other hand.

More significantly, the study revealed a scholarly connection linking many *`Ulama* from different places in the Muslim world, both in the case of conservatives and of reformers. The nature of these connections reinforce the need to study the existence of this "network" of scholars, ideas and supporters, that interact with each other and give the Muslim world a kind of intellectual uniformity. Both in the cases of al-Nabhāni and the reformers there appears to be a level of interaction and influence among different scholars and thinkers who belonged to the same school and shared the same worries and even some of the same enemies. This was clear in the case of al-Nabhāni whose ideas on reforms and *Ijtihād* were supported by *`Ulama* from

---

[3] *Al-Manār*::30(1927): 141-4.
[4] See B. Abu Manneh. "Sheikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi and Sultan Abdulhamid II", Martin Kramer. *Islam Assembled*, and Shaw. *A History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*.

different places,[5] and condemned by others. Besides the reply of al-Alūsi to *The Testimonies of Truth,* Bahjat al-Bitār, the famous Damascene scholar and writer, refuted al-Nabhāni's *Rā'iyya.*[6] Sulaymān ibn Sahmān was another Wahhabi who wrote another poem invalidating the *Rā'iyya.*[7] The *Salafi* scholars such as al-Afghāni, `Abduh and Rida had influenced many of their contemporary scholars and thinkers, leaving their traces on modern Islamic thought that has infiltrated every Muslim country and has affected every aspect of Islamic resurgence since the early twentieth century.

In addition, al-Nabhāni's political activities within his Sufi context and network, and `Abd al-Hamīd's dependency and reliance on Sufis and conservatives to promote his political agenda exemplify the interdependency between religion and politics in Islam. Within this context, religion and politics were not separate or distinct but inextricably interrelated. On one hand, `Abd al-Hamīd's policy towards Muslims and towards Europe had to be articulated in a popular Islamic discourse and legitimized by an authoritative Islamic voice. On the other hand, the survival of many Sufi Orders at the time depended on the political establishment and on the 'political' role they acquired. As a result, our historical approach to Islam and Islamic institutions at a certain period –the late Ottoman period in our case- is a far-reaching examination of different political, social and religious factors that fashion our

---

[5] See for example, the encomium of al-Nabhāni's book *The Testimonies of Truth.*
[6] Commins. *Islamic Reform:* 118. Al-Bitār's response was *al-Tāmma al-Kubrā.* However, I was not able to locate a copy of al-Bitār's, who includes in another book a footnote on this book saying that he wrote it as a response to al-Nabhāni and sent it to al-Alusi in Iraq to publish it with other responses to al-Nabhāni . See Muhammad Bahjat al-Bitār. *Naqd `ayn al-mizān.* (Qaymariya, 1912-13): 3.
[7] Ibn Sahmān's poem is not published yet. Sources indicate that it is still a manuscript preserved in the National Museum of Iraq. See Al-`Awdāt. *Min a`lām al-*

understanding and analysis of Islam. *Ijtihād* here serves as a clear example. *Ijtihād*, developed as a legal tool to harmonize text (*nas* or *naql)* and reason (*ra`y* or *`aql*), was used by reformers to introduce and validate religious, social and political changes into Islamic societies and to challenge the *taqlīd* regimen. The conservatives, however, in opposing *Ijtihād* were protecting their long-established tradition of Islamic scholarship and were opposing European intrusion of any kind into Muslim societies. The Ottoman ruler was encouraging the anti-*Ijtihād* movement out of his fear of the political implications of *Ijtihād*. Thus, a legal question such as *Ijtihād* can not be studied in its theological context alone but, as our study has shown, needs a broader context which allow us the examination of the overlap between what is often categorically defined as 'religion' and 'politics'.

The thesis does not only address the lack of analysis of conservative approaches to modernity and does not only fill a gap in the literature on modern Islamic thought. It also proposes the possibility to inquire about the role scholarly networks and connections can play in our understanding of the 'politics' of religion. This may enable the Western perspective on the dichotomy of 'religion' and 'politics' to better conceive their overlap and interdependency.

---

fikr wa al-adab: 621.

Bibliography

`Abduh, Muhammad. *Risālat al-wāridāt fi nazariyyāt al-mutakallimīn wa al-sufiyya*. Egypt: Matba`at al-Manār, 1925.

_____. *The Theology of Unity*. London, Gearge Allen & Unwin, 1966.

Abu-Manneh, Butrus. "Sultan `Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Al-Sayyadi." *Middle Eastern Studies*. 15(1979): 133-153.

_____. "The Sultan and the Bureaucracy: The anti-Tanzimat Concepts of Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim Paşa." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22(1990): 257-274.

Adams, Charles C. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad `Abduh*. New York: Russel and Russel, 1933.

Al-Afghāni, Jamāl al-Dīn. *Al-radd `ala al-dahriyyīn*. Cairo: Assalām al-`alamiyya, 1983.

Al-Afghāni, Jamāl al-Dīn & Muhammad `Abduh. *Al-`Urwa al-wuthqa*, 3rd. edition. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-`Arabi, 1983.

Akarli, Engine D. "Abdulhamid II's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System." In *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social and Economic Transformation*. pp. 74-89. David Kushner (ed.). Jerusalem: Yad Izhak
Ben-Zvi, 1986.

Ayalon, Ami. *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995

Al-`Awdāt, Ya`kūb (al-Badawi al-Mulatham). *Min A`lām al-fikr wa al-adab fi filastīn*. Amman, Jam`iyyat `Ummāl al-Matābi` al-Ta`awuniyya, 1976.

Bacque-Grammont, Jean-Louis and Paul Dumont, eds. *Economie et sociétés dans l'empire ottoman (fin du XVIII^e - début du XX^e siecle)*. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1983.

Baldick, Julian. *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*. London: I.B.Tauris & Co. ltd., 1989.

Badawi, M. A. Zaki. *The Reformers of Egypt. London: Groom Helm, 1978.*

Bayumi, Zakariya Sulayman. *Al-Turuq al-sūfiya bayn al-Sāsah wa al-Siyāsah fi Misr al-mu`āsira 1903-1983*. Cairo: Dar a-Sahwa, 1992.

Al-Bitār, `Abd al-Razzāq. *Hilyat al-bashar fi tārīkh al-qarn al-thālith `ashar*, Vol. 3. Damascus, al-Majma` al-`Ilmi, 1963.

Antony Black. "Decolonization of Concepts." *Journal of Early Modern History*1(1997): 55-69.

Buheiry, Marwan R.. *Intellectual Life in Arab East, 1890-1939.* Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981.

Burckhardt,Titus. *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine.* Lahore: Kashmiri Bazar, 1959.

Brown, Daniel W. *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

Carter, Findley. *Ottoman Civil Officialdom. A Social History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Commins, David Dean. *Islamic Reform: Politics and social Change in Late Ottoman Syria.* Oxford University Press, 1990.

Davison, Roderic H. *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

Deringil, Selim. "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman empire, 1808-1908" *Comparative Studies in Society and History.* 35(1993): 1-27.

_____ . "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909)," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23(1991): 345-359.

_____. "An Ottoman View of Missionary Activity in Hawaii." *Hawaiian Journal of History* (1993): 119-125.

_____. "The Struggle Against Shi'ism in Hamidien Iraq." *Die Welt Des Islams* 30(1990): 45-62.

_____. *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909.* London: I. B. Tauris, 1998.

Dodge, Bayard. *Al-Azhar: A Millenium of Muslim Learning.* Washington: Middle East Institute, 1961.

Fareed, Muneer Goolam. *Legal Reform in the Muslim World: The Anatomy of a Scholarly Dispute in the 19th and the Early 20th Centuries on the Usage of Ijtihad as a Legal Tool.* San Fransisco: Austin & Winfield, 1996.

Fares, Salim (ed.) *Kanz al-raghā'ib fi muntakhabāt al-jawā'ib*. Istanbul: Mataba`at al-Jawā'ib, 1877.

Farhi, David. "The Şeriat as a Political Slogan – or the 'Incident of the 31st *Mart*." *Middle Eastern Studies* 7(October, 1971): 275-299.

Al-Fāsi, Abd al-Hafiz. *Mu`jam al-shuyūkh al-musamma riyād al-janna aw al-mudhish al-mutrib* Vol. 2. Ribāt: al-Matba`a al-Wataniyya, 1931.

Fawaz, Leila T. *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Findley, Carter. *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Geertz, Clifford. *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Al-Ghāmidi, Sa`īd bin Sa`d Sifr. *Mawqif al-mu`ārada fi al-mashriq al-`arabi min hukm al-sultan `Abd al-Hamīd al-Thāni (al-Shām wa Misr), 1876-1909*. Riyād: Maktabat al-Tawbah, 1992.

Gilesenan, Michael. *Saint and Sufi in modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973.

Haddad, William & William Ochsenwald (ed.). *Nationalism in a non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977.

Al-Hāfiz, Muhammad *Mutī'*. *Tārīkh `ulama' dimashq fi al-qarn al-rābi` `ashar al-hijri*, Vols. I, II, III. Damascus: Dar al-fikr, 1986.

Hallaq, Wael. *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni usūl al-fiqh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

_____. *Law and Legal Theory in Classical and Medieval Islam*. Hampshire: Variorum, 1995.

_____. "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1984): 3-41.

Hamzeh, Nizar & R. Hrair Dekmejian. " A Sufi Response to Political Islamism: Al-Ahbash of Lebanon," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28(1996): 217-229.

Hirszowicz, L. "The Sultan and the Khedive, 1892-1908." *Middle Eastern Studies* 8(1972): 287-311.

Holt, P. M. *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent 1516-1922*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.

Homerin, Th. E. "Ibn Taymiya's al-Sufiya wa-al-Fuqara," *Arabica: Revue d' Etudes Arabes* 32(Juillet 1985): 219-244.

Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. London: Faber & Faber, 1991.

_____. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962.

_____. "How should we write the History of the Middle East?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23(1991): 125-136.

Ibish, Yusuf. *Rahalāt al-Imām Muhammad Rashīd Rida*. Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-`Arabiyya li al-Dirasāt wa al-Nashr, 1971.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad. *Majmū`at al-tawhīd al-Najdiyya*. Cairo, Matba`at al-Manar, 1926.

Inalcik, Halil & Donald Quataert (eds.). *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Kahhala, `Umar. *Mu`jam al-mu'allifin*. Damascus: Matba`at al-Taraqqi, 1961.

Kayali, Hasan. *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*. Berkeley: University of California press, 1997.

Kawtharāni, Wajīh (ed.). *Rashid Rida: Mukhtarat siyasiya min majallat al-Manār*. Beirut: Dār al-Tali`a, 1980.

Keddie, Nikki R. "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdulhamid II" 3(October, 1966): 46-67.

_____. *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

_____ .(ed.) *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Kedourie, Elie. *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and political Activism in Modern Islam*. London: Frank Cass & Cc. Ltd, 1966.

Kerr, Malcolm H. *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad `Abduh and Rashid Rida*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

Kramer, Martin. *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Lambton, Ann K. S. *State and Government in Medieval Islam*. London:1985.

Lapidus, Ira M. *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,1988.

Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization.* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990.

_____. *The Hejaz Railway and the Muslim Pilgrimage: A Case of Ottoman Political Propaganda*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971.

_____. *Middle Eastern Themes: Papers in History and Politics*. London: Frank Cass, 1973.

Levtzion, Nehemia & John O. Voll (eds.) *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam.*

Lewis, Bernard. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (2nd Edition). London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Livingston, John W. "Muhammad `Abduh on Science" *The Muslim World* 85 3(July 1995): 215-234

Mannā`, `Adel. *A`lām Filastīn fi awākhir al-`ahd al-`uthmāni, 1800-1918*, 2nd Edition. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filastiniyya, 1995.

Ma`oz, Moshe. *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Mardin, Şerif. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*. Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989.

Martin, B.G. *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Martin, Richard et al. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu`tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997.

Masud, Muhammad Khalid et al. *Muslim Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Mujāhid, Zaki Muhammad. *Al-A`lām al-sharqiyya fi al-ma'a al-rābi`a `ashrata al-hijriyya*. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmi, 1994.

Al-Nabhāni, Yūsuf. *Al-dalālāt al-wādihāt wa al-mubashirāt al-manāmiyya nabawiyya wa ghayr nabawiyya.*(2sd. edition) Egypt: Matba'at Mustafa al-Halabi, 1955.

_____. *Afdal al-salawāt 'ala sayyid al-sādāt.* Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Aadabiyya, 1891-92 H.

_____. *Al-Ahādīth al-arba`īn fi wujūb tā`at amīr al-mu`minīn, wa yalīhi lahu Khulāsat al-bayān fi ba`d maāther mawlāna al-sultān `Abd al-Hamīd al-thāni wa ajdādih Āl Uthmān.* Beirut: al-Matba`a al-Adabiyya, 1894-95 H.

_____. *Al-Anwār al-muhammadiyya min al-mawāhib al-laduniyya.* Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Adabiyya, 1892-93 H.

_____. *Al-Dalālāt al-wādihāt: hashiya mukhtasara `ala dala'il al-khayrāt wa yalīha al-mubashirāt al-manāmiyya nabawiyya wa ghayr nabawiyya.* Cairo: Matba`at Mustafa Bābi al-Halabi, 1955.

_____. *Al-Fadā'il al-muhammadiyya.* Beirut: al-Maktaba al-`Uthmaniyya, 1900-91 H.

_____. *Jāmi` karāmāt al-awliyā'.* Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, 1991.

_____. *Al-Majmu`a al-nabhaniyya fi al-madā'ih al-nabawiyya.* Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.

_____. *Al-Qasīda al-ra'iyya al-kubra fi al-kamalāt al-ilāhiyya wa-alsīra al-nabawiyya wa wasf al-milla al-islāmiyya wa al-milal al-ukhra.* n. p., 1908.

_____. *Al-Rahma al-muhdāt fi fadl al-salāt.* Hamah: Dar al-Da'wa. n.d.

_____. *Al-Rā'iya al-sughra fi dham al-bid'a wa madh al-sunna al-gharra.* n. p, n. d.

_____. *Al-sihām al-sā'iba li ashāb al-da`āwa al-kāziba fi al-radd 'ala mudda`ī al-ijtihād.* n. p, n. d.

_____. *Hujjat Allah 'ala al-`ālamīn fi mu`jizāt sayyid al-mursalīn.* Istanbul: Maktabat Ishiq, 1974.

_____. *Husn al-shūra.* n.p, n. d.

_____. *Hādi al-murīd ila turuk al-asānīd.* n. p., n. d.

_____. *Irshād al-hayāra fi tahdhīr al-muslimīn min madāris al-nasāra.* n. p, 1901.

_____. *Jawāhir al-bihār fi fadā'il al-nabiyy al-mukhtār.* Beirut: al-Matba`a al-Adabiyya, 1909.

_____. *Riyād al-janna fi adhkār al-kitāb wa al-sunna.* Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1979.

_____. *Sa`ādat al-dārayn fi al-salāt 'ala sayyid al-kawnayn.* Beirut: Matba`at Beirut, 1899.

_____. *Shawāhid al-haqq fi al-istighātha bi sayyid al-khalq.* Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1990.

_____. *Tanbīh al-afkār ila hikmat iqbāl al-dunya 'ala al-kuffār.* n. p., n. d.

_____. *Wasā'il al-wusūl ila shamā'il al-rasūl.* Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayāt, 1970.

Peters, Rudolph. "Idjtihad and Taqlid in 18th and 19th century Islam.' *Die Welt des Islams* XX(1980-4): 131-145.

_____. "Religious Attitudes Towards Modernization in the Ottoman Empire: A Nineteenth century pious text on steamships, factories and the telegraph." *Die Welt des Islams* 26(1986): 76-105.

Polk, William R. & Richard L. Chambers (ed.). *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Al-Qāsimi, Zāfer. *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimi wa `asruhu.* Damascus: Maktabat Atlas, 1965.

Rafeq, `Abd al-Karīm. *Al-`Arab wa al-`uthmaniyyun, 1516-1916,* 2nd. Edition. Damascus: Matba`at Atlas, 1993.

Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Life.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982.

Rida, Muhammad Rashid. *Al-Manār.* Cairo: Matba`at al-Manār.

_____. "Opinions des réformistes modérés salafiya." *Revue du monde musulman* 59(1:1925), pp. 312-313.

_____. *Tārīkh al-ustādh al-shahīd Muhammad `Abduh.* Cairo: Matba`at al-Manār, 1931.

Al-Rifā`i, Shams al-Dīn. *Tārīkh al-sahāfa al-suriyya. Vol.1, Al-sahāfa al-suriyya fi al-`ahd al-`uthmāni.* Cairo: Dār al-ma`ārif, 1967.

Roff, William. "Islamic movements: one or many?" *Islam and the Political Economy of meaning.* William Roff (ed.). London: Groom Helm, 1987.

Salvatore, Armando. *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity.* Berkshire, Ithaca Press, 1997.

Al-Sahsawāni, Muhammad Bashīr. *Kitāb siyānat al-insān `an waswasāt al-shaykh Dahlān.* (Cairo: Matba`at al-Manar, 1351).

Al-Sayyādi, Abu al-Huda. *Diwān al-durr al-muntazim: mukhtasar barāhīn al-hukm.* n. p., 1904.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *And Muhammad is His Messenger.* Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1985.

_____. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

_____. *Spiritual Aspects of Islam.* Venezia: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1962.

Shahin, Emad Eldin. "Muhammad Rashīd Ridā's Perspectives on the West as Reflected in *Al-Manār.*" *The Muslim World* 79(April, 1989): 113-132.

Shaw, Stanford J. & Ezel Kural Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol.III: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Sulayman ibn Sahmān. *Al-Diyā' al-shāriq fi radd shubuhāt al-mādhiq al-fāsiq.* Riyad: Dar al-`Asima, 1992.

_____. *Al-Sawā`iq al-mursala al-shuhābiyya `ala al-shubah al-dahīda al-shāmiyya.* Riyad: Dar al-`Asima, 1988.

Al-Tawīl, Tawfīq. *Al-tasawwuf fi misr ibbān al-hukm al-`uthmāni.* Cairo: Maktabat al-Adāb, 1946.

Tibawi, A. L. *A Modern History of Syria including Lebanon and Palestine.* Macmillan: St. Martin's Press, 1969.

Trimingham, J. Spencer. *The Sufi Orders in Islam.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Voll, John. "Conservative and Traditional Brotherhoods." *AAPSS* 524(November, 1992).

Voll, John Obert. *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World.* Boulder, Westview Press, 1982.

Winter, Michael. *Society and Religion in Early ottoman Egypt.* New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1982.

Zilfi, Madeline C.. *The politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)*. Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988.